

E-commerce Development Task Force convenes first meeting (with photos)

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau today (January 29) established the E-commerce Development Task Force and convened its first meeting to kick-start the work on co-ordinating and formulating policies and measures on the development of electronic commerce (e-commerce).

The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address the establishment of the interdepartmental Task Force to implement policies to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developing e-commerce business to expand their markets. The Task Force is chaired by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, with members from the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, the Trade and Industry Department, the Customs and Excise Department, and Hongkong Post, as well as the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation and the Hong Kong Productivity Council.

Mr Yau said, "E-commerce business is growing rapidly worldwide and involves various government policy areas and objectives. Government bureaux and departments shall work together to formulate policies and measures to assist Hong Kong enterprises in expanding their businesses and enhancing their competitiveness through developing e-commerce."

"To kick-start the work of the Task Force, we will implement a series of measures this year, including organising Hong Kong Shopping Festivals on e-commerce platforms; launching E-commerce Easy under the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales; and strengthening the provision by the four SME centres of information on conducting e-commerce on the Mainland, with a view to assisting SMEs in leveraging the enormous opportunities of the Mainland domestic sales and e-commerce markets," he added.

At the meeting today, the Task Force considered and endorsed its terms of reference, reviewed the Government's existing support measures that facilitate the development of e-commerce by enterprises and discussed the aforementioned new measures, for charting the direction of the work of the Task Force.

The meeting also endorsed the establishment of an expert group to offer advice to the Task Force to help keep the Government abreast of the market situation of e-commerce development and feedback from the trade more comprehensively. The expert group comprises Legislative Council Members from different sectors and representatives in the industry. The membership list is set out in the Annex.



[Speech by DSJ at seminar on New Mechanism for Reciprocal Recognition and Enforcement of Civil and Commercial Judgments between the Courts of Mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region \(English only\) \(with photo\)](#)

Following are the closing remarks by the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Mr Cheung Kwok-kwan, at the seminar on "New Mechanism for Reciprocal Recognition and Enforcement of Civil and Commercial Judgments between the Courts of Mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" co-organised by the Supreme People's Court (SPC) and the Department of Justice today (January 29):

Judge Guo (Judge Guo Zaiyu of the Fourth Civil Division of the SPC), Judge Gu (Deputy Chief Judge of the Fourth Civil Division of Guangdong High People's Court, Judge Gu Enzhen), Director General Zhou (Director General of the Research Office of the SPC, Mr Zhou Jiahai), Deputy Director General Si (Deputy Director General of the Research Office of the SPC Ms Si Yanli), Director Zhang (Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Judicial Affairs Office, Research Office of the SPC, Ms Zhang Xinmeng), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. Today marks the commencement of the Mainland Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters (Reciprocal Enforcement) Ordinance, a milestone of cross-border mutual legal assistance in civil and commercial matters. To commemorate this remarkable achievement, we join our hands with the Supreme People's Court to organise the seminar today.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the speakers of today, who have kindly shared their valuable insights and observations on the new mechanism. The coverage of today's seminar is broad and deep. In the keynote speeches this morning, the Secretary for Justice, judges from the Supreme People's Court, and our judiciary have shared with you the significance of the Arrangement and its important features. In the two thematic sharing sessions, we have the honour to have judges from both places as well as top-notch lawyers and academics to analyse the Arrangement in detail, the legal instruments implementing the Arrangement as well as related legal concepts which may be different under Mainland and Hong Kong law. The last panel discussion gathered leading figures from the legal and business sectors as well as Mainland courts, who have unveiled the implications of the Arrangement from their respective expert angles with advice on how to make use of the implementation of the new mechanism. We are also most pleased to hear from the Mainland judges that preparation has been duly made by the Mainland courts to take forward the new mechanism.

I would also like to thank every one of you who participated in today's seminar. The Arrangement brings lasting impact to Hong Kong and the Mainland. As we take forward the implementation of the Arrangement, we are aware of some unfortunate misconceptions on the implications of the new mechanism. The Department of Justice and the Supreme People's Court are surely alerted about these misconceptions and we have made timely clarifications. It is indeed of paramount importance to promote a correct understanding of the Arrangement. The seminar today hence is very timely.

We hope that through the seminar today, participants have gained access to the underlying policy-making rationale as well as an accurate picture of how the Arrangement will operate in both places. After having heard the helpful comments and observations generously shared by the judges and experts today, we would have a firmer grasp of what the new mechanism is, how it would work, what advantages it would bring and why it would be relevant to you.

The Arrangement not only benefit individual parties whereby parties could take the advantage of the streamlined procedures for cross-boundary enforcement of civil and commercial judgments at a lower cost, and at the same time enjoying a higher degree of certainty on the cross-boundary enforceability of the judgments they have obtained, but it also benefits Hong Kong as a whole. Hong Kong is the first and only common law jurisdiction to have an arrangement with the Mainland on reciprocal recognition and enforcement with such a comprehensive coverage. It seems most sensible that Hong Kong would be a more popular spot for dispute resolution, and would develop into a regional centre for international legal and dispute resolution services as outlined in the National 14th Five-Year Plan.

Upon the commencement of the Arrangement, we turn a new page of the regime for mutual legal assistance in civil and commercial matters between Hong Kong and the Mainland, which enhances important connections between the legal systems of the two places, and in turn exemplifies the unique advantages of the fundamental principle of "one country, two systems". Beyond today's seminar, the Department of Justice and the Supreme People's Court

would continue to maintain close contact and monitor how the Arrangement is implemented. We would also continue our efforts in promoting the new mechanism among different sectors in the community. We welcome your views as we continue to strive for the betterment of the cross-boundary regime of mutual legal assistance, which would ultimately better serve the public interest of our country.

May I thank once again the Supreme People's Court for their unfailing support and dedicated efforts in taking forward mutual legal assistance in both places over the past few decades, particularly their sharing and attendance at today's seminar in person.

The Year of the Dragon is approaching. May I take this opportunity to wish all of you a fruitful and flourishing Year of the Dragon ahead. Thank you very much.



[Raising social security payments and providing CSSA and OALA recipients with municipal solid waste charging subsidy](#)

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) announced today (January 29) that starting from February 1 this year, it would raise the standard payment rates under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme as well as the rates of the Old Age Allowance (OAA), Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) (including OAA and OALA under the Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme) and Disability Allowance (DA) under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme.

An SWD spokesman said, "On December 8 last year, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council gave approval for the Government to adjust the above rates upwards by 3.3 per cent with effect from February 1 this year in accordance with the established mechanism, i.e. on the basis of the year-on-

year rate of change of the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices. The above adjustment will benefit around 1.5 million people."

The spokesman added, "According to the established mechanism, the Government adjusts the maximum rent allowance (MRA) under the CSSA Scheme taking into account the year-on-year rate of change of the Consumer Price Index (A) rent index for private housing. Although the MRA should be adjusted downwards correspondingly starting from February 1 this year according to the relevant mechanism, the Government will continue to maintain the MRA at the current levels (see Annex I), as the difficult global economic environment may continue to weigh on Hong Kong's economy, and CSSA recipients remain one of the most economically vulnerable groups."

The adjusted CSSA standard payment rates and the SSA rates of allowances are set out in Annex II.

Separately, to tie in with the implementation of municipal solid waste (MSW) charging, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council has also given approval for the provision of a subsidy of \$10 per person per month to CSSA and OALA recipients, originally effective from April 1, 2024, having regard to their financial needs. As the Environment and Ecology Bureau announced on January 19, 2024, that the statutory commencement date of MSW has changed to August 1, 2024, the above MSW charging subsidy will take effect from August 1, 2024, accordingly.

CSSA and SSA recipients may contact their respective social security field units or call the SWD hotline 2343 2255 for enquiries.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on January 26 to noon today (January 29), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 256 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category, in the past three days (including last Saturday and Sunday). No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan"

(www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website

(www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website

(www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 27 573 samples of food imported from Japan (including 18 432 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 7 870 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Interest rate of fifth interest payment for Silver Bond Series due 2024

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority, as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, announced today (January 29) the relevant per annum interest rate for the fifth interest payment of Silver Bond Series due 2024 (Issue Number: 03GB2408R) (the Bonds) issued under the Retail Bond Issuance Programme of the Government Bond Programme.

According to the Issue Circular dated June 29, 2021 for the Bonds, the fifth interest payment of the Bonds is scheduled to be made on February 14, 2024 (Note), and the relevant interest rate is scheduled to be determined and announced on January 29, 2024 as the higher of the prevailing Floating Rate and Fixed Rate.

On January 29, 2024, the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate are as follows:

Floating Rate: +2.22% (Annex)

Fixed Rate: +3.50%

Based on the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate set out above, the relevant interest rate for the fifth interest payment is determined and announced as 3.50% per annum.

Note: The original fifth interest payment was on February 12, 2024. As the aforesaid payment is not a business day in Hong Kong, the interest payment date will be rescheduled on the next day which is a business day in Hong Kong in accordance with the Issue Circular. The interest continues to accrue to the new payment date.