

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, January 24, 2024 is 104.6 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).

LCQ4: Measures to facilitate the flow of people between the Mainland and Hong Kong

Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

Starting from February 20 last year, six categories of Mainland talents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area may apply for the exit endorsement for talents travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao, which allows them to travel to and from Hong Kong multiple times within the validity period of the exit endorsement. Besides, the 2023 Policy Address has announced that foreign staff of companies registered in Hong Kong may apply for multiple-entry visas which are valid for two or more years to travel to the Mainland. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of persons travelling to Hong Kong with the aforesaid exit endorsement for talents since its implementation, together with a breakdown by category of talents and number of days of their stay;

(2) given that academic institutions (such as post-secondary institutions) are not companies registered in Hong Kong, whether the aforesaid multiple-entry visa arrangement covers research and development (R&D) personnel of such institutions (including students, teaching staff and researchers); if so, of the application procedures, and whether an upper limit has been set on the number of applicants; if the arrangement does not cover such personnel, whether the Government can strive for the Mainland's introduction of the relevant arrangement; and

(3) given that the Development Plan for Shenzhen Park of Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone has proposed to provide travel convenience for R&D personnel, starting with a "highly convenient first-line entry and exit" model for customs clearance, of the progress of negotiations between the Government and the Mainland on the

relevant arrangements?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong actively leverages on our distinctive advantages of being backed by the Motherland and connected to the world under "one country, two systems" to better integrate into our country's development and serve well as the hub connecting the domestic and global markets. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is a major national strategy and the best entry point for us to actively integrate into the overall development of the country. A rich and diverse pool of human resources serves as major impetus for development. As such, the interactions and exchanges of talents in the GBA, especially the two way flow and co-operation among innovation and technology (I&T) talents, are crucial to the development of Hong Kong and the construction of GBA as a whole. All these present unlimited promise for Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been in close discussion with the Mainland on the facilitation measures to promote the "southbound and northbound" flow of high-end talents in the GBA. In February 2023, the Mainland introduced the "southbound" exit endorsement for talents, facilitating the travel of six categories of GBA Mainland talents (i.e. outstanding, scientific research, education, healthcare, legal and other talents) to Hong Kong. Later on, the 2023 Policy Address announced that foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies could make applications in Hong Kong for "northbound" multiple entry visas to the Mainland for two years or more with priority processing. This measure targets at foreign staff holding a Hong Kong Identity Card. It is not limited to any particular industries or talent categories, and is in line with the HKSAR's objective of actively maintaining diversity and internationalisation.

In response to the various parts of the question raised, my reply is as follows:

(1) The "southbound" GBA exit endorsement for talents was introduced by the Mainland in February 2023. Eligible holders are allowed to travel to and from Hong Kong multiple times within the validity period of the exit endorsement. During each visit, they are allowed to stay in Hong Kong for not exceeding 30 days, which is far longer than the normal seven-day period for other types of exit endorsement. As at the end of 2023, nearly 10 000 talents had travelled to Hong Kong with the exit endorsement for talents. They included 347 talents under the "Outstanding" category with exit endorsement valid for five years, 5 872 talents in the fields of Scientific Research, Education or Healthcare with exit endorsement valid for three years, and 3 739 talents under Legal and Other with exit endorsement valid for one year. The Immigration Department does not maintain statistics on the number of days of stay in Hong Kong for holders of exit endorsement for talents.

Regarding the "northbound" travel of Hong Kong talents, the 2023 Policy

Address announced the multiple-entry visas policy. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of "multiple-entry" visas issued for two or five years in Hong Kong, with about 9 000 applications approved. Before the introduction of the measure, most "multiple-entry" visas approved for the first time in Hong Kong had a validity period of no more than six months.

The two measures have been well received since their introduction, and have greatly facilitated the two way flow of talents in the GBA.

(2) As mentioned above, the measure announced in the 2023 Policy Address has particularly benefited foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies. They may apply for two-year or five-year multiple-entry visas with priority processing. This measure has no cap on the number of applicants.

Considering the needs of academic and scientific research institutions, we have discussed with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR (OCMFA). The OCMFA agreed to extend the priority processing applicable to foreign staff of Hong Kong-registered companies to academic and scientific research institutions in Hong Kong. Applicants are only required to complete the visa application forms online and go directly to the Chinese Visa Application Service Center in Wan Chai for completion of processing. Their visas are to be collected on the next day at the earliest and there is no cap on the number of applications.

Such a tailor-made policy for the HKSAR will help attract high-end corporations and talents around the world to settle in Hong Kong, and gather as well as take root in the GBA.

(3) The Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (Co-operation Zone) locates at the convergence point of the Northern Metropolis and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen I&T corridor, which consists of the 87-hectare Hong Kong Park and the 300-hectare Shenzhen Park. The first three buildings of the first phase of the Hong Kong Park will be completed gradually from the end of 2024 as planned.

The Co-operation Zone will operate under the mode of "one zone, two parks", with scientific researchers going to work early and returning home late between the two parks every day in future. As such, it is necessary to provide convenient clearance mode and facilities for designated personnel to cross the border conveniently.

The Security Bureau will collaborate with the Mainland authorities concerned to actively explore an innovative clearance mode which will allow designated scientific researchers between the two places to go through immigration clearance by using a cross-river footbridge connecting the two parks. Upon pre-verification of their eligibility, the personal data of these scientific researchers will be kept in a database for comparison purpose during clearance. For entry or exit via the cross-river footbridge, they are only required to scan their faces in front of the camera at the automatic channels and use face recognition technology to verify their identities against the database. They are not required to present any identification

documents or QR codes during the process. The immigration clearance will be completed upon successful verification, thereby achieving contactless clearance.

Looking ahead, the HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close communication with the Mainland authorities on the solid basis of the "southbound" and "northbound" policies, with a view to further promoting the interactions and exchanges of talents in the GBA, and building a high-level talent cluster in the GBA. At the same time, we will make strenuous efforts to tie in with the development of the Co-operation Zone to ensure that scientific researchers can travel conveniently between the two parks, so as to make greater contribution to the high-quality development of our country.

Thank you, President.

LCQ6: Municipal Solid Waste Charging

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

The Government will implement Municipal Solid Waste Charging (MSW charging). The policy intent is that it is primarily the responsibility of individual households to bear the charges for designated bags (DBs) and designated labels (DLs), so as to drive behavioural changes for achieving waste reduction. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed if there will be a peak season of waste disposal prior to the implementation of MSW charging; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the corresponding measures in place, for instance, whether it will increase law enforcement manpower, extend the opening hours of facilities provided under GREEN@COMMUNITY, and increase the number of food waste smart recycling bins;

(2) given that both DBs and DLs come with anti-counterfeit features, but recently, rubbish bags purported to be DBs are available for sale on some Mainland shopping websites, whether the Government has gained an understanding if there is a price difference between the two, and whether it has studied if the purchase of this type of rubbish bags by the public and property management companies (PMCs) is in conflict with the intent of MSW charging; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the follow-up actions; and

(3) as there have been criticisms about inadequate publicity on MSW charging

although it will be implemented soon, whether the Government has formulated plans to conduct publicity in an overwhelming manner in collaboration with PMCs, owners' corporations as well as District Services and Community Care Teams; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The practice of waste reduction and recycling has long been deeply rooted in the culture of many advanced cities, and there is a need for Hong Kong to catch up. The implementation of municipal solid waste (MSW) charging and the introduction of new methods to promote waste reduction and recycling are important steps for Hong Kong SAR to cultivate the local practice of waste reduction and recycling, and build our ecological civilisation.

To implement MSW charging successfully, it is critical that the public has thorough understanding of the scheme and actively participates in it. I have earlier announced that –

1. the statutory commencement date of MSW charging will be revised to August 1, 2024; before which we will spare no time in promoting MSW charging in a more concrete manner to all sectors of the community; and
2. starting from April 1, 2024, the Government will demonstrate the implementation of MSW charging in government departments and some other buildings, which will serve as promotion to and education for the community.

The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration will lead and co-ordinate the inter-bureaux-departmental collaboration within the Government.

My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

(1) In the past, the annual peak period of waste disposal always occurred before the Lunar New Year, and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will be prepared for it. Starting from January 16, the FEHD will launch the annual year-end clean-up campaign across the territory. During the campaign, the FEHD will establish over 200 temporary refuse collection points across all districts for residents to discard oversized household waste, and increase the frequency of refuse and oversized waste collection in all districts.

The FEHD will spare no effort in combating illegal disposal of waste and will adopt a multi-pronged approach to combat fly-tipping activities, including strengthening promotion and education, deploying designated enforcement teams to take enforcement actions, and utilising Internet Protocol cameras to gather evidence to assist in conducting prosecutions and planning for more effective enforcement actions.

As for GREEN@COMMUNITY, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has already requested relevant operators to strengthen their manpower before

the Lunar New Year, and extend the operating hours from 7pm to 10pm on the 28th day of the last Lunar month, so as to handle the possible increase in the amount of recyclables. In addition, new Recycling Stores in 50 public rental housing estates will commence operation progressively around April 1, 2024, among which GREEN@KWAI FONG, GREEN@TAI WO HAU and GREEN@KAI YIP have already commenced their services. The public recycling spots over the territory will be progressively increased to more than 220.

For the recycling of food waste, the EPD has been progressively installing smart recycling bins for food waste collection in all public rental housing (PRH) estates in Hong Kong, with the target of completing the installations within 2024. We expect that smart food waste recycling bins will be installed at 100 PRH estates before the Lunar New Year, covering over 710 building blocks and approximately 1.15 million residents, which accounts for about half of the PRH estates in Hong Kong. In addition, the EPD is providing assistance to private residential buildings to install smart recycling bins for collecting food waste through the Recycling Fund and the Environment and Conservation Fund. We anticipate that a total of 30 private housing estates and three rural villages will be covered by the above funding schemes before the Lunar New Year, with approximately 100 smart food waste recycling bins installed.

(2) To facilitate the implementation of MSW charging, the EPD has authorised supermarkets, convenience stores, pharmacies and online platforms to sell Designated Bags (DBs) and Designated Labels (DLs) at over 3 000 sales points. The details were promulgated on January 15, 2024.

The EPD has recently noticed that some garbage bags which were claimed to be DBs had been put up for sale on a mainland Website. Upon investigation, it was found that the website stated in the question is not an authorised retailer of the EPD, and while the price of the garbage bags claiming to be "DBs" is relatively cheaper, they are not "DBs" as prescribed by the legislation and cannot be used as DBs. We have also reported the incident to the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department (Customs) for follow-up investigation, and would like to remind the public to purchase DBs and DLs only from retail outlets and online platforms with the Authorisation Logo.

Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362), any person who sells or possesses, for the purpose of selling, counterfeit goods commits an offence, and is liable on conviction to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for five years. The EPD will maintain close communication with the Customs to combat these illegal activities.

(3) To facilitate different stakeholders in better understanding the arrangements of MSW charging, the EPD has been organising operational briefings and specialised trainings for stakeholders from all sectors since August last year. As at December 2023, we have conducted more than 250 physical or online meetings and briefings, reaching out to over 11 000 stakeholders from various trade sectors. Taking the property management and the environmental hygiene trades as examples, the EPD has set up a working group with representatives of the trades and have jointly formulated Best

Practice Guides and training videos. In parallel, the EPD is actively conducting briefings and training sections for property management companies and cleansing workers.

We have also been arranging briefings for different building organisations (including the property management trade, cleansing companies and owners' organisations). We have organised 52 briefings so far for over 6 000 participants. We are also collaborating with the Property Management Services Authority to organise continuing professional development seminars on MSW charging for holders of the Property Management Practitioner Licence and representatives of licensed property management companies.

Furthermore, the EPD is now conducting briefings on the policy and implementation details of MSW Charging for District Councils or the relevant subcommittees thereunder and will attend seminars organised by district personalities. We are also liaising with the Home Affairs Department to engage the District Service and Community Care Teams of the 18 districts to assist in publicising MSW charging in their respective districts. Besides EPD attending briefings arranged by district personalities, the Government will also mobilise all departments to assist in publicising MSW charging.

The overall public education and promotional campaign on MSW charging will be carried out continuously and with greater efforts to enhance the public's understanding on the charging arrangements.

Thank you, President.

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 23 to noon today (January 24), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 141 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. 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).

In parallel, 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 26 846 samples of food imported from Japan (including 17 908 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 7 618 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Hong Kong Customs combats counterfeit electronic goods activities involving cross-boundary transshipments (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs conducted a two-week enforcement operation from January 8 to 19 to combat counterfeit electronic goods activities involving cross-boundary transshipments. During the operation, Customs detected 19 related cases and seized more than 14 800 items of suspected counterfeit electronic goods, including earphones, mobile phones, computer tablets and

electronic watches, with an estimated market value of over \$10 million. Three men were arrested.

Through risk management and intelligence analysis, Customs detected 15 related cases at various express couriers and local logistics companies. More than 9 900 items of suspected counterfeit electronic goods with a total estimated market value of over \$4.7 million were seized.

Moreover, through risk assessment, Customs detected a total of four related cases at the Tuen Mun River Trade Terminal and the Shenzhen Bay Control Point. Customs officers intercepted one container and three incoming trucks on January 9, 15 and 16, and seized about 4 900 items of suspected counterfeit electronic goods with an estimated market value of over \$5.9 million in total. Three male truck drivers, aged 43, 60 and 63, were arrested.

Investigations of the above-mentioned cases are ongoing. The three arrested men have been released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs reminds practitioners in the logistics industry to comply with the requirements of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) and to check with the trademark owners or authorised agents if the authenticity of a product is in doubt.

Customs will continue to step up inspection and enforcement to vigorously combat different types of counterfeit goods activities.

Under the TDO, any person who imports or exports or sells or possesses for sale any goods to which a forged trademark is applied commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Members of the public may report any suspected counterfeiting activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).



