

# [Hong Kong signs first protocol to amend ASEAN – Hong Kong, China free trade agreement](#)

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, signed today (January 9) the First Protocol to Amend the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Hong Kong (the Protocol), to update the Product Specific Rules (PSR) of origin under the FTA, enhancing the coverage of the PSR from more than 200 categories of products to almost 600, thereby enabling Hong Kong businesses to more easily and effectively gain Hong Kong-originating status for an increased number of specified products, and thus enjoy preferential tariff treatment when expanding into the growing ASEAN market.

The specified products incorporated into the FTA through the Protocol include various categories of products of interest to Hong Kong traders and manufacturers, such as jewellery, medicaments, food products and textile products. The signing of the Protocol will help enhance the competitiveness of the products concerned and trade flows, creating more business opportunities for Hong Kong businesses in the ASEAN market.

"ASEAN is Hong Kong's second-largest trading partner in merchandise trade with a total trade volume of around \$1,294 billion in 2022, representing a growth of over 38 per cent since the signing of the FTA in 2017. Our burgeoning trade has been uplifted by the FTA, signifying the latter's importance in consolidating our position as an international trade centre," Mr Yau said.

"I have full confidence that the implementation of the Protocol will further drive growth in our economic and trade relations with the ASEAN member states. As a staunch proponent of free trade, Hong Kong, joining hands with our trading partners, will continue to strive for further liberalisation of trade in the region," he added.

The text of the Protocol will be uploaded onto the Trade and Industry Department's website ([www.tid.gov.hk/english/ita/fta/hkasean/index.html](http://www.tid.gov.hk/english/ita/fta/hkasean/index.html)) after all parties have completed their signing. Hong Kong and ASEAN will continue to work closely to bring about the early implementation of the Protocol, so that Hong Kong exporters may reap the benefits as soon as possible.

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# Caritas Institute of Higher Education acquires university title

Subsequent to the approval by the Chief Executive-in-Council today (January 9), the Permanent Secretary for Education has approved the change of the English and Chinese names of the Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE) to "Saint Francis University" and "聖法蘭西大學," respectively in accordance with the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) (the Ordinance).

The Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, congratulated the institution. She said, "The granting of a university title not only represents a milestone for the CIHE but also bears testimony to the Government's commitment to promoting the parallel development of the publicly funded and self-financing post-secondary education sectors to provide young people in Hong Kong with quality, flexible and diversified study pathways. I trust that the self-financing post-secondary sector would continue to play a pivotal role in nurturing talent to support Hong Kong's manpower needs and its further development into an international hub for post-secondary education."

The CIHE is the fourth self-financing post-secondary education institution granted a university title. In line with the revised roadmap for post-secondary colleges to become private universities as published in 2015, the Government has taken relevant factors into account before granting a university title to the CIHE, including its breadth of programmes; research capability; size and scale; as well as governance and management, financial sustainability, academic environment and quality assurance.

To assess its readiness for becoming a private university, the CIHE invited the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to undertake an Institutional Review in 2022. The HKCAAVQ concluded that the CIHE met the standards expected of a private university.

Founded in 1985 as the Caritas Francis Hsu College, the institution became an approved post-secondary college in 2001 to operate sub-degree programmes. After acquiring an accreditation status for offering degree-level programmes in 2010, it changed its name to the CIHE in 2011. In the 2023/24 academic year, the CIHE operates 13 self-financing locally accredited post-secondary programmes, comprising 12 bachelor's degree programmes and one master's degree programme, with about 3 000 full-time and 500 part-time students in total.

The CIHE has attained Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) status in the areas of General Business Administration, Social Work, and Information and Communication Technology. The PAA status obtained will continue to be subject to periodic institutional reviews by the HKCAAVQ. Having acquired a university title, the CIHE will be required to submit a progress report

together with an audited financial report to the Education Bureau annually to ensure its teaching quality and financial sustainability. The Education Bureau has commissioned the HKCAAVQ to review the reports and provide independent expert advice to the Bureau.

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## **Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Korea suspended**

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (January 9) that in view of notifications from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 and H5N6 avian influenza in Jangheung-gun and Boseong-gun of Jeollanam-do Province respectively in Korea, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above-mentioned areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 50 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat and about 23.85 million poultry eggs from Korea in the first nine months of last year.

"The CFS has contacted the Korean authority over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the WOAH and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

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## **FEHD releases ballot results of applications for rental of market stalls in Sunlight Market**

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (January 9) conducted open balloting for the applications for rental of market stalls in the FEHD Sunlight Market in Tung Chung, and the ballot results have been released.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "Rental of seven market stalls in the Sunlight Market was open for application. A total of 85 eligible applications

were received. Ballots were drawn today to determine the order of priority of eligible applicants in selecting a market stall for rental."

The ballot results have been uploaded to the FEHD website ([www.fehd.gov.hk](http://www.fehd.gov.hk)) for viewing by applicants. Applicants can also visit the Islands District Environmental Hygiene Office from tomorrow (January 10) or call the hotline 2852 3606 to check the results. The FEHD will also notify all eligible applicants by SMS and mail of their priority number and later issue letters to invite successful applicants for stall selections and signing of the Licence Agreement according to their priority.

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## **SWD reports suspected incident involving leakage of personal data**

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (January 9) that a contract staff member had improperly copied the English names of about 1 300 applicants for the "Special Care Subsidy Scheme for Persons with Severe Disabilities" to the Internet, without following the relevant guidelines.

The SWD expresses sincere apologies for the incident which has been reported to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data. The SWD has written to the individuals affected by the incident and contacted them by phone to explain the incident. Although the information involved is confined to English names without other identifiable personal information such as identity card numbers, dates of birth or contact means, the individuals concerned have been advised to take precautions to prevent fraudulent acts.

The SWD attaches great importance to safeguarding personal privacy. The service contract of the staff member concerned has been terminated. The SWD has also reminded staff to comply with the departmental guidelines and exercise due care in handling personal particulars related to members of the public. For enquiries, members of the public may contact the Carer Allowances and Subsidies Team of the SWD on telephone number 3468 5645.