

Puppetry and vocal theatre “Book of Mountains and Seas” to be staged at Kwai Tsing Theatre from this Friday (with photos)

Highly acclaimed American-Chinese composer Huang Ruo and puppetry master Basil Twist from the United States recast the ancient Chinese mythology "Book of Mountains and Seas" as a daring yet poetic new puppetry and vocal theatre. The performance will be staged at the Kwai Tsing Theatre on November 3 and 4 (Friday and Saturday).

This puppetry and vocal theatre features singers from Ars Nova Copenhagen alongside two Hong Kong percussionists, massive puppets and striking lanterns to tell four Chinese mythological tales of the Legend of Pangu, the Legend of Ten Suns, the Spirit Bird, and Kua Fu Chasing the Sun. Production designer and director Twist injects art and life into objects large and small, such as monsters, giants, birds and animals, and the 10 suns through raw and simple materials.

The "Book of Mountains and Seas" rolls geography, travelogue, shamanism, mythology and fiction all into one. These creative stories and characters seem occult yet timeless in particular when human beings are facing the stringent challenge of the nature nowadays.

The "Book of Mountains and Seas", one of the programmes of the New Vision Arts Festival (NVAF), will be held at 8pm on November 3 and 4, at the Kwai Tsing Theatre Auditorium. Tickets priced at \$200, \$280, \$380 and \$460 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288, or use the mobile ticketing app "URBTIX". Various discount schemes, including the newly introduced weekend package booking discount, are being offered.

The "Book of Mountains and Seas" is performed in Putonghua with Chinese and English surtitles. A meet-the-artist session will be held after the performance at the Auditorium on November 3.

Organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the NVAF is running from October 20 to November 19, showcasing an array of interdisciplinary programmes by overseas and local performing groups and artists. For programme enquiries, please call 2370 1044 or visit www.nvaf.gov.hk.



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 October 30 to noon today (October 31), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 160 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 11 271 samples of food imported from Japan (including 7 487 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 3 358 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Visa-free access to Georgia for HKSAR passport holders

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) has received notification from the Government of Georgia that HKSAR passport holders may visit Georgia visa-free for a stay of up to 30 days.

An Immigration Department spokesman said, "Georgia is along the Belt and Road. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, this visa-free arrangement will bring travel convenience to holders of HKSAR passports and strengthen the tourism, cultural and economic ties between the two places."

As of today, 169 countries and territories have granted visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to HKSAR passport holders. Please visit the following website for details:

www.immd.gov.hk/eng/service/travel_document/visa_free_access.html or scan the QR code in the attachment.

Advance estimates on Gross Domestic Product for third quarter of 2023

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (October 31) the advance estimates on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the third quarter of 2023.

According to the advance estimates, GDP increased by 4.1% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 over a year earlier, compared with the increase of 1.5% in the second quarter. The continuous expansion in GDP in the third quarter of 2023 was mainly attributable to the further improvement in domestic demand and services trade.

Analysed by major GDP component, private consumption expenditure increased by 6.5% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 over a year earlier, after the increase of 7.7% in the second quarter.

Government consumption expenditure measured in national accounts terms recorded a decline of 4.5% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 from a year earlier, compared with the decrease of 9.8% in the second quarter.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation increased by 18.2% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 over a year earlier, as against the decrease of 0.5% in the second quarter.

Over the same period, total exports of goods measured in national accounts terms recorded a decline of 8.6% in real terms from a year earlier, narrowed from the decrease of 15.1% in the second quarter. Imports of goods measured in national accounts terms fell by 6.0% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023, compared with the 15.8% decline in the second quarter.

Exports of services rose by 24.0% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 over a year earlier, compared with the increase of 22.8% in the second quarter. Imports of services increased by 28.5% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023, after the increase of 25.4% in the second quarter.

On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-quarter comparison basis, GDP increased by 0.1% in real terms in the third quarter of 2023 when compared with the second quarter.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the Hong Kong economy continued to revive in the third quarter of 2023, supported by inbound tourism and private consumption. According to the advance estimates, real GDP grew by 4.1% in the third quarter over a year earlier. On a seasonally adjusted quarter-to-

quarter basis, real GDP increased by 0.1%.

Analysed by major expenditure component, total exports of goods continued to fall amid weak external demand for goods. Exports of services expanded notably further thanks to the continued revival of visitor arrivals. Domestically, private consumption expenditure increased further alongside rising household income and the Government's various support initiatives, though the rate of increase moderated somewhat. Overall investment expenditure rebounded sharply against a low base of comparison a year ago.

Looking ahead, inbound tourism and private consumption will continue to underpin economic growth for the rest of the year. More visitors could be received as handling capacity recovers further. As regards private consumption, continued improvement in household income and the Government's various support initiatives including "Night Vibes Hong Kong" should provide support. Yet, the difficult external environment amid increasing geopolitical tensions and tight financial conditions would continue to weigh on exports of goods and investment and consumption sentiment.

The revised figures on GDP and more detailed statistics for the third quarter of 2023, as well as the revised GDP forecast for 2023, will be released on November 10, 2023.

Further information

The year-on-year percentage changes of GDP and selected major expenditure components in real terms from the third quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2023 are shown in Table 1.

When more data become available, the C&SD will compile revised figures on GDP. The revised figures on GDP and more detailed statistics for the third quarter of 2023 will be released at the C&SD website (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode250.html) and the Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure Component report (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1030001&scode=250) on November 10, 2023.

For enquiries about statistics on GDP by expenditure component, please contact the National Income Branch (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 5077 or email: gdp-e@censtatd.gov.hk).

Financial results for the six months ended September 30, 2023

The Government announced today (October 31) its financial results for

the six months ended September 30, 2023.

Expenditure for the period April to September 2023 amounted to HK\$355.6 billion and revenue HK\$131.3 billion, resulting in a cumulative year-to-date deficit of HK\$177.7 billion after taking into account the proceeds of HK\$46.6 billion received from issuance of green bonds under the Government Green Bond Programme (Green Bond).

A Government spokesperson said that the cumulative year-to-date deficit for the period was mainly due to the fact that some major types of revenue including salaries and profits taxes are mostly received towards the end of a financial year.

The fiscal reserves stood at HK\$657.1 billion as at September 30, 2023.

Detailed figures are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1. CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT (Note 1)

	Month ended September 30, 2023 HK\$ million	Six months ended September 30, 2023 HK\$ million
Revenue	13,490.2	131,354.4
Expenditure	(54,972.9)	(355,638.5)
Deficit before issuance of Green Bond	(41,482.7)	(224,284.1)
Proceeds received from issuance of Green Bond	–	46,632.0
Deficit after issuance of Green Bond	(41,482.7)	(177,652.1)
Financing		
Domestic		
Banking Sector (Note 2)	41,590.0	171,090.3
Non-Banking Sector	(107.3)	6,561.8
External	–	–
Total	41,482.7	177,652.1

Government Debts as at September 30, 2023 (Note 3)

HK\$166,566 million

Debts Guaranteed by Government as at September 30, 2023 (Note 4)

HK\$147,492 million

TABLE 2. FISCAL RESERVES

	Month ended September 30, 2023 HK\$ million	Six months ended September 30, 2023 HK\$ million
Fiscal Reserves at start of period	698,620.4	834,789.8
Consolidated Deficit after issuance of Green Bond	(41,482.7)	(177,652.1)
Fiscal Reserves at end of period (Note 5)	657,137.7	657,137.7

Notes:

1. This Account consolidates the General Revenue Account and the following eight Funds: Capital Works Reserve Fund, Capital Investment Fund, Civil Service Pension Reserve Fund, Disaster Relief Fund, Innovation and Technology Fund, Land Fund, Loan Fund and Lotteries Fund. It excludes the Bond Fund, the balance of which is not part of the fiscal reserves. The Bond Fund balance as at September 30, 2023, was HK\$309,581 million.

2. Includes transactions with the Exchange Fund and resident banks.

3. These were the Green Bonds (equivalent to HK\$166,566 million as at September 30, 2023) issued under the Government Green Bond Programme. They were denominated in US dollars (US\$9,750 million with maturity from May 2024 to January 2053), euros (4,500 million euros with maturity from January 2025 to November 2041), Renminbi (RMB30,000 million with maturity from November 2024 to June 2033) and Hong Kong dollars (HK\$20,800 million with maturity from February 2024 to May 2025). They do not include the outstanding bonds with nominal value of HK\$268,121 million and alternative bonds with nominal value of US\$1,000 million (equivalent to HK\$7,831 million as at September 30, 2023) issued under the Government Bond Programme (with proceeds credited to the Bond Fund). Of these bonds under the Government Bond Programme (including Silver Bonds with nominal value of HK\$139,621 million, which may be redeemed before maturity upon request from bond holders), bonds with nominal value of HK\$103,559 million will mature within the period from October 2023 to September 2024 and the rest within the period from October 2024 to May 2042.

4. Includes guarantees provided under the SME Loan Guarantee Scheme launched in 2001, the Special Loan Guarantee Scheme launched in 2008, the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme launched in 2012 and a commercial loan of the Hong

Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation.

5. Includes HK\$307,545 million, being the balance of the Land Fund held in the name of "Future Fund", for long-term investments up to December 31, 2030. The Future Fund also includes HK\$4,800 million, being one-third of the actual surplus in 2015-16 as top-up.