

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, March 23, 2020 is 109.8 (up 0.1 against last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, March 21, 2020 was 109.7 (up 0.5 against last Friday's index).

Consumer Price Indices for February 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (March 23) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures for February 2020. According to the Composite CPI, overall consumer prices rose by 2.2% in February 2020 over the same month a year earlier, larger than the corresponding increase (1.4%) in January 2020. The larger increase in the Composite CPI in February was related to fading out of the effect of the Government's payment of public housing rentals and waiver of two-thirds of rent for tenants of Group B estates by Hong Kong Housing Society in January 2020. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rate of increase in the Composite CPI (i.e. the underlying inflation rate) in February 2020 was 2.5%, smaller than that in January 2020 (3.7%). The smaller increase was mainly due to the decreases in the charges for package tours and the smaller increases in the costs for meals bought away from home after the Lunar New Year.

It should be noted that consumer prices tend to show greater volatility in the first two months of a year due to the timing of the Lunar New Year. As the Lunar New Year fell in late January this year but in early February last year, the year-on-year comparison of the figures for January and February 2020 might have been affected by this factor to a certain extent. Taking the first two months of 2020 together to neutralise the effect of the Lunar New Year, the Composite CPI rose by 1.8% over a year earlier. Netting out the effect of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rate of increase was 3.1%.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the average monthly rate of change in the Composite CPI for the three-month period ending February 2020 was 0.0%, and the corresponding rate of change for the three-month period ending January 2020 was -0.5%. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rates of change were 0.1% and 0.3% respectively.

Analysed by sub-index, the year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI(A),

CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 2.7%, 2.1% and 1.8% respectively in February 2020, as compared to -2.0%, 2.8% and 3.4% respectively in January 2020. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 3.3%, 2.3% and 1.8% respectively in February 2020, as compared to 4.3%, 3.5% and 3.4% respectively in January 2020.

Taking the first two months of 2020 together, the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) rose by 0.4%, 2.4% and 2.5% respectively over a year earlier. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rates of increase were 3.7%, 2.9% and 2.6% respectively.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, for the three-month period ending February 2020, the average monthly rates of change in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were -0.1%, 0.0% and 0.0% respectively. The corresponding rates of change for the three-month period ending January 2020 were -1.8%, 0.0% and 0.2% respectively. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the average monthly rates of increase in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) for the three-month period ending February 2020 were 0.2%, 0.1% and 0.1% respectively, and the corresponding rates of increase for the three-month period ending January 2020 were all 0.3%.

Amongst the various components of the Composite CPI, year-on-year increases in prices were recorded in February 2020 for food (excluding meals bought away from home) (14.6%), miscellaneous goods (4.3%), housing (2.7%), meals bought away from home (1.5%), transport (1.0%) as well as alcoholic drinks and tobacco (0.9%).

On the other hand, year-on-year decreases in the components of the Composite CPI were recorded in February 2020 for electricity, gas and water (-15.9%); clothing and footwear (-3.1%); durable goods (-2.4%) and miscellaneous services (-1.3%).

For the three months ending February 2020, the Composite CPI rose by 2.2% over a year earlier, while the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) rose by 1.3%, 2.6% and 2.5% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 3.0%, 3.6%, 2.8% and 2.5% respectively.

For the 12 months ending February 2020, the Composite CPI was on average 2.8% higher than that in the preceding 12-month period. The respective increases in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 2.9%, 2.8% and 2.7% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 3.0%, 3.6%, 2.8% and 2.6% respectively.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that taking the first two months of 2020 together to neutralise the distortions by the timing of the Lunar New Year, the underlying consumer price inflation rate went up slightly to 3.1% from

2.9% in December 2019, mainly due to larger increases in prices of pork and some other basic foodstuffs. Price pressures on most major CPI components remained modest or moderate.

Looking ahead, inflation should remain largely moderate in the near term. External price pressures have receded amid a weak global economy and the recent strengthening of the Hong Kong dollar along with the US dollar, while the subdued local economic conditions should keep domestic cost pressures at bay. The Government will continue to monitor the inflation situation closely, particularly the impact on the lower-income people.

Further information

The CPIs and year-on-year rates of change at section level for February 2020 are shown in Table 1. The time series on the year-on-year rates of change in the CPIs before and after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures are shown in Table 2. For discerning the latest trend in consumer prices, it is also useful to look at the changes in the seasonally adjusted CPIs. The corresponding time series on the average monthly rates of change during the latest three months for the seasonally adjusted CPIs are shown in Table 3. The rates of change in the original and the seasonally adjusted Composite CPI and the underlying inflation rate are presented graphically in Chart 1.

More detailed CPI data (including year-on-year comparison, month-to-month comparison, seasonally adjusted data series and the CPIs by the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP)) are available in the monthly reports. Users can download the February 2020 issue of the "Monthly Report on the Consumer Price Index"

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp270.jsp?productCode=B1060001), the time series of CPIs at detailed level

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp270.jsp?productCode=D5600001), the time series of CPIs at COICOP division level

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp270.jsp?productCode=D5600002) and the time series of CPIs after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp270.jsp?productCode=D5600003) free of charge at the website of the C&SD.

For enquiries about the CPIs, please contact the Consumer Price Index Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7374 or email: cpi@censtatd.gov.hk).

[Latest arrangements on services of Public Records Office of Government](#)

Records Service

In view of the latest situation of COVID-19, the Government Records Service (GRS) announced today (March 23) that its Public Records Office (PRO) will maintain Search Room services only on Mondays for members of the public who have made reservations for holdings through the online catalogue. Services for all other days of the week will be suspended with immediate effect until further notice.

Reservations for inspecting PRO's holdings can be made through its online catalogue. Reservation requests by up to 15 users will be accepted for each open day on a first-come, first-served basis. Users will be notified of the reservation result by email.

As part of the infection control measures, while cleansing of public facilities in the Hong Kong Public Records Building will be enhanced, any person entering the Hong Kong Public Records Building will undergo an on-the-spot body temperature check arranged by the GRS. Anyone whose body temperature is higher than the prescribed level or who refuses to undergo a body temperature check will not be allowed to enter the building.

In addition, the Exhibition Hall of the Hong Kong Public Records Building will continue to be temporarily closed, and visitor and public education programmes will also be cancelled until further notice.

The GRS will continue to monitor the situation closely and review the arrangements in a timely manner. Members of the public are advised to visit the GRS website (www.grs.gov.hk) for the latest updates. For enquiries, please email at proinfo@grs.gov.hk.

SCS visits colleagues at OGCI0's monitoring centre (with photos)

The Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law, today (March 23) visited the monitoring centre of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) in Hong Kong City Hall to show concern for the work of civil servants in coping with the increasing number of people put under compulsory quarantine at their dwelling places.

The colleagues in all three of the OGCI0's monitoring centres work busily using the location-sharing functions of communication software, video calls, electronic wristbands and the new "StayHomeSafe" mobile app to ensure that persons undergoing quarantine are staying at their dwelling places.

Knowing that many retired civil servants are helping out at the OGCI0's monitoring centres, Mr Law expressed gratitude to them for their dedication. He said that when the epidemic started and most people were afraid of going out, many retirees were willing to commute to and work at the monitoring centres.

Mr Law also thanked the serving civil servants who are working as volunteers at the centres, noting that some of them have even joined the work of the monitoring centres after finishing their own work at their offices.

Mr Law said, "The relentless efforts of so many colleagues are encouraging and they show that civil servants are fighting the COVID-19 virus together, whether they are directly involved in anti-epidemic work or not."



TD announces tender results for "Central – Hung Hom" and "water taxi" ferry services

The Transport Department (TD) announced today (March 23) that, after conducting an open tender invitation, Fortune Ferry Company Limited has been selected to operate the "Central – Hung Hom" and "water taxi" ferry services.

In response to the public views on providing more in-harbour ferry services and the suggestion of "water taxi" in the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry and incorporating commercial elements at the Hung Hom (South) Ferry Pier with a view to improving the vibrancy of the harbourfront and public enjoyment, the TD invited tenders for operation of the "Central – Hung Hom" and "water taxi" ferry routes on December 13 last year. By the close of the tender invitation on January 24 this year, two companies had submitted tenders. After thorough assessment, Fortune Ferry Company Limited was selected to operate the ferry services.

The newly granted licences for the "Central – Hung Hom" and "water taxi" ferry routes, which will commence operation in the second and fourth quarters of this year respectively, will last for a period of five years. The TD will announce the operation commencement dates and service details of the above ferry routes in due course. To ensure smooth introduction of the new ferry routes, the TD will closely monitor the gearing-up activities carried out by the above-mentioned company.

The "Central – Hung Hom" in-harbour ferry route will ply between the Hung Hom (South) Ferry Pier and Central Pier No. 8 (Western Berth). The Hung Hom (Hung Luen Road) Public Transport Interchange and the Whampoa MTR Station are situated in the vicinity of the Hung Hom (South) Ferry Pier. The ferry service will provide passengers with an alternative option, whereby they may interchange with various routes of franchised bus, green minibus or MTR services to go to different districts in Kowloon and the New Territories.

For the "water taxi" ferry route, there will be five calling points along its main route, namely Kai Tak Runway Park Pier Landing No. 1 or No. 2; Hung Hom (South) Ferry Pier; Tsim Sha Tsui Landing No. 2 or No. 5; Central Pier No. 8 (Western Berth), No. 9 or No. 10; and marine landing facilities at the southern waterfront of the West Kowloon Cultural District. Passengers will be able to freely hop on and hop off at any calling point. The operator will also provide short-working ferry services between individual points, the details of which will be announced when services are geared up.