

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 is 106.7 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).

Land Registry releases statistics for February

The Land Registry today (March 3) released its statistics for February 2020.

Land registration

* The number of sale and purchase agreements for all building units received for registration in February was 4,413 (+16.9 per cent compared with January 2020 but -11.7 per cent compared with February 2019)

* The 12-month moving average for February was 6,034 (0.8 per cent below the 12-month moving average for January 2020 and 3.6 per cent below that for February 2019)

* The total consideration for sale and purchase agreements in February was \$35.3 billion (+21.6 per cent compared with January 2020 but -15.2 per cent compared with February 2019)

* Among the sale and purchase agreements, 3,572 were for residential units (+29.3 per cent compared with January 2020 but -12.6 per cent compared with February 2019)

* The total consideration for sale and purchase agreements in respect of residential units was \$30.4 billion (+22.7 per cent compared with January 2020 but -15.7 per cent compared with February 2019)

Statistics on sales of residential units do not include sale and purchase agreements relating to sales of units under the Home Ownership Scheme, the Private Sector Participation Scheme and the Tenants Purchase Scheme unless the premium of the unit concerned has been paid after the sale restriction period.

Figures on sale and purchase agreements received for the past 12 months, the year-on-year rate of change and breakdown figures on residential sales have also been released.

As deeds may not be lodged with the Land Registry until up to 30 days after the transaction, these statistics generally relate to land transactions in the previous month.

Land search

* The number of searches of land registers made by the public in February was 321,609 (-6.0 per cent compared with January 2020 but +3.0 per cent compared with February 2019)

The statistics cover searches made at the counter, through the self-service terminals and via the Integrated Registration Information System Online Services.

Government extends funding scopes of Researcher Programme and Postdoctoral Hub

The Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) today (March 3) announced that, with effect from March 9, the funding scopes of the Researcher Programme and the Postdoctoral Hub will be extended to all technology companies conducting or planning to conduct research and development (R&D) activities in Hong Kong. Eligible companies are welcome to apply for the schemes.

At present, the Researcher Programme and the Postdoctoral Hub provide funding support for organisations or companies undertaking R&D projects funded by the Innovation and Technology Fund and incubatees and innovation and technology (I&T) tenants of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, as well as start-ups selected for investment under the Innovation and Technology Venture Fund, to recruit researchers and postdoctoral talents to conduct R&D work. With the enhancements, the programmes will assist more local technology companies in engaging research staff, creating more local R&D jobs and enlarging the pool of I&T talent in Hong Kong.

Under the enhanced schemes, each eligible company can engage two researchers and two postdoctoral talents, each with a maximum engagement period of 36 months. The maximum monthly allowances for researchers with a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree from a local university are \$18,000 and \$21,000 respectively. The maximum monthly allowance for postdoctoral talents is \$32,000. More information is available on the programme websites. For enquiries, please email the ITC or contact the ITC at 3655 5678.

Researcher Programme:

Website: www.itf.gov.hk/l-eng/RP.asp

Email: rptc-enquiry@itc.gov.hk

Postdoctoral Hub:

Website: www.itf.gov.hk/l-eng/TTS-PH.asp

Email: phtc-enquiry@itc.gov.hk

[Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting](#)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting with the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, and Director of Immigration, Mr Erick Tsang today (March 3):

Reporter: Madam Chief Executive, three questions, question number one, do you think the Government owes the Hong Kong people who have been stranded in Hubei for more than a month an apology because of your delay to evacuate them until now when other countries have already done so much earlier? Question number two, despite the widespread concerns over the use of force by the Police during the protest, the Police will still be given a rather substantial boost in manpower in the next financial year. Why do you think it is the right time to do so when people's concerns have not been addressed and when will the review committee you promised going to be set up? Question number three, about the report to Beijing in which you apparently said you hope the Government's handling of the epidemic can turn public opinion and eventually can help the pro-government camp in the LegCo election, so how can we expect the election in September will be a fair one when the Government favours one particular camp? Thank you.

Chief Executive: Thank you. Three questions. First question, we do not feel that we have delayed the return of Hong Kong people stranded in Hubei. As you are aware, even up to this point, Hubei Province, particularly the city of Wuhan, is still under a very challenging situation in terms of the infections and the outbreak, in terms of cases confirmed. As far as I understand, even up to this moment, there are still very clear restrictions on exit arrangements as well as transport arrangements leaving Hubei Province. As I said in the introductory remarks that as soon as the conditions are ready for us to help Hong Kong residents to come back to Hong Kong, we have immediately made the arrangements to do so with the support of the Hubei Provincial Government. I hope we will all realise that the whole of Hubei Province is still struggling and doing all their best in containing this coronavirus, but

at the same time they have set aside manpower and other resources to help us to undertake this very major operation to bring our Hong Kong people back.

As far as the second question is concerned, every year, every department will have to prepare their estimates of expenditure for the next financial year, and every department will put forth their requirements in terms of funding, in terms of manpower in the estimates, and those requirements were very carefully scrutinised by the senior echelons in the Government, particularly on the financial side. The Police requirements have gone through that process, a very vigorous process, and are considered justified given the present circumstances. I hope that people will understand that law and order remains very important in Hong Kong and we should be assured that we have that capacity to ensure Hong Kong remains a safe city.

As far as the question on the internal report, it has always been our established policy and practice that we will not comment or respond to any speculations about internal communication or correspondence between the Hong Kong SAR Government and the Central People's Government. This time is no exception. I would not be providing any response to that except to assure the community that in the last one and a half month or so, in fighting this virus, every decision made by the Hong Kong SAR Government is based on science and justification, especially with the very pertinent advice tendered by the four experts on the expert advisory panel that I have set up at the very beginning of this process. The ultimate objective is to contain the spread of this virus in Hong Kong so that we could protect not only the health of the people of Hong Kong but also the economic and social situation in Hong Kong.

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: As regards to your first question, I would like to supplement that, in the case of Hong Kong, we have to consider that there are now more than 3,800 Hong Kong people seeking assistance who are staying in Hubei and in more than 30 cities. On the first day of receiving these requests, we have already started the contingency planning for transferring these people back to Hong Kong. But we have to consider the right moment to do so. We have to take into account the epidemic situation in the Mainland and the situation in Hong Kong. We also have to consider carefully the public health risk in transferring a large group of people from one place to another. Of course at the same time, we have to make sure that we have sufficient quarantine facilities in Hong Kong so that we could take care of the 14 day- compulsory quarantine requirement. Last but not the least, also a very important one, is that we have to assess very carefully the impact on our hospital system because we may expect, or we cannot rule out the possibility that some of these people returning to Hong Kong might become confirmed cases. So we have to monitor the situation very carefully. Once the moment is right, we start to implement the operation.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

A mild and wet February

February 2020 was much warmer than usual. The monthly mean maximum temperature was 21.4 degrees, 2.5 degrees above the normal figure of 18.9 degrees and the sixth highest on record for February. The monthly mean temperature of 18.5 degrees and the mean minimum temperature of 16.6 degrees were 1.7 degrees and 1.6 degrees above their corresponding normal figures respectively, both being the joint eighth highest on record for February. Moreover, the winter from December 2019 to February 2020 was exceptionally warm in Hong Kong. The mean maximum temperature of 21.5 degrees was the highest on record for the same period. The mean temperature of 18.7 degrees and the mean minimum temperature of 16.8 degrees were both the second highest on record for the same period. February 2020 was wetter than normal with a monthly rainfall of 79.8 millimetres, about 47 per cent above the normal figure of 54.4mm. The accumulated rainfall recorded in the first two months of the year was 94.6mm, about 20 per cent above the normal figure of 79.1mm for the same period.

Under the influence of the northeast monsoon, it was cool in the morning with sunny periods during the day on February 1. Affected by the cloud band spreading over southern China, local weather turned cloudier with rain patches from February 2 to 4. With the strengthening of an easterly airstream on February 5 and the subsequent replenishment of the northeast monsoon on February 7, Hong Kong was mainly cloudy with rain patches and cool mornings from February 5 to 11. As the northeast monsoon affecting southern China was gradually replaced by a maritime airstream on February 12, local weather became warm with sunny periods and coastal mist. The visibility at Chek Lap Kok once fell to around 1000 metres on that day.

Affected by an upper-air disturbance, the weather of Hong Kong turned cloudy with thundery showers on February 13 and 14. The showers were particularly heavy on the morning of February 13, which necessitated the issuance of the first Amber Rainstorm Warning in the year. This was also the second earliest Amber Rainstorm Warning since the rainstorm warning system commenced operation in 1992. More than 30mm of rainfall were recorded over Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, Lantau Island and Sai Kung. Under the influence of a humid maritime airstream, it was cloudy and foggy in Hong Kong on February 15 with the visibility at Waglan Island falling below 200 metres.

A cold front moved across the coast of Guangdong on the night of February 15. Locally, it was mainly cloudy with occasional rain and was appreciably colder on February 16. The associated intense but dry winter monsoon brought generally fine weather to the territory with cold mornings on February 17 and 18. Under a clear sky, the temperatures at the Hong Kong Observatory fell to a minimum of 10.3 degrees on the morning of February 17, the lowest of the month.

The dry northeast monsoon continued to bring generally fine weather to Hong Kong from February 19 to 23. With the moderation of the northeast

monsoon, local weather became mainly cloudy with sunny intervals during the day on February 24. Under the influence of a maritime airstream, it became warm with sunny periods on February 25. With plenty of sunshine on February 26, temperatures at the Hong Kong Observatory rose to the month's highest of 28.1 degrees in the afternoon, the second highest on record for February. Under the influence of a fresh to strong easterly airstream, the weather of Hong Kong became cloudier and slightly cooler on February 27. With the easterlies moderating and gradually replaced by a maritime airstream, it became warmer with sunny periods in Hong Kong on February 28 and 29.

There was no tropical cyclone over the South China Sea and the western North Pacific in February 2020.

Details of issuance and cancellation of various warnings/signals in February are summarised in Table 1. Monthly meteorological figures and departures from normal for February are tabulated in Table 2.