

First batch of solar energy generation systems installed in schools participating in Solar Harvest put into use (with photos)

The Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, visited Fung Kai Innovative School in Sheung Shui yesterday (January 20) to understand the operation of solar energy generation systems in the first batch of schools participating in Solar Harvest.

Mr Wong together with the students first listened to a presentation by project engineers and designers about the environmental protection elements and design concepts of the solar energy generation system. They then viewed the solar panels installed at the school rooftop, where the panels form the school's English abbreviation "FKIS". Mr Wong also learnt about the operation of the real-time energy monitoring system. He said he was pleased to learn that students could have a first-hand understanding of renewable energy through Solar Harvest and that the school also planned to integrate the solar energy generation system into teaching to enhance students' environmental awareness and their interest in science.

Mr Wong said that Solar Harvest has received an enthusiastic response since its launch in March 2019. More than 210 applications have been received from eligible schools and welfare organisations in Hong Kong. At present, three schools have completed installation of solar energy generation systems and started receiving Feed-in Tariff (FiT) payment. It is estimated that the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) will install solar energy generation systems at about 50 schools and welfare organisation premises in this financial year. This batch of systems can generate about 400 000 kWh of electricity each year, which equates to the annual electricity consumption of about 120 households.

At the site, Mr Wong spoke with students on his experience of how individuals and schools can help mitigate climate change. He also encouraged them to adopt low-carbon lifestyles in respect of clothing, food, living and travel.

To mitigate climate change, the Government in recent years has been promoting the development of renewable energy in Hong Kong and has taken the lead by earmarking \$2 billion to install renewable energy systems at suitable government premises. The Government is also actively developing larger-scale solar energy generation systems at suitable reservoirs and landfills.

The Government introduced FiT in 2018 to encourage the community to develop distributed renewable energy systems. It has also introduced various facilitation measures, including suitably relaxing the installation restrictions on the rooftops of New Territories Exempted Houses (commonly

known as "village houses"). While there were only some 200 private renewable energy systems connected to the power grids over the decade prior to the introduction of FiT, the two power companies have received over 7 000 applications and approved about 6 000 of them from October 2018 to December 2019.

To implement the initiative to promote the use of renewable energy announced in the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address, the EMSD launched Solar Harvest to provide eligible non-government and non-profit-making schools, as well as welfare non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which are receiving recurrent subvention from the Social Welfare Department (SWD), with a one-stop service including conducting site visits and technical assessments at their premises, drawing up the designs of the solar energy generation systems, procuring and installing equipment, and conducting system testing. The EMSD also helps the participants to apply to join the FiT Scheme and the revenue can be used for repair and maintenance of the solar energy generation systems. All expenses in relation to solar energy generation system installation and application to join the FiT Scheme will be fully covered by Solar Harvest.

The second round of application for Solar Harvest has just been opened and the application deadline is April 17. Interested non-government and non-profit-making schools and welfare NGOs which are receiving recurrent subvention from the SWD can download the application forms from the EMSD's website (re.emsd.gov.hk). For enquiries, please contact the EMSD by telephone at 3155 3977 or by email (solarharvest@emsd.gov.hk).





Public hospital daily update on Wuhan-related cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (January 21), public hospitals had reported to the Department of Health (DH) the admission of 11 patients (five male and six female, aged 8 to 82) in the past 24 hours who met the reporting criteria.

Specimens of the patients concerned have been sent to the DH for testing. Currently, there are 21 patients still under isolation, 19 patients are in stable condition, and two patients in North District Hospital are in critical condition and serious condition respectively due to their underlying diseases. One reported case in North District Hospital has passed away yesterday due to her underlying diseases and her test result for novel coronavirus was negative.

There are currently no patients confirmed as being infected with novel coronavirus in public hospitals.

The Hospital Authority (HA) earlier enhanced laboratory surveillance for pneumonia cases to have early identification of severe community-acquired pneumonia associated with novel coronavirus. The HA Central Committee on Infectious Disease and Emergency Responses (CCIDER) held an ad hoc meeting again today. It was agreed that the enhanced laboratory surveillance would be further extended to include inpatient pneumonia cases with travel history to Mainland China within 14 days before onset of symptoms.

The spokesperson for the HA reminded that restricted visiting arrangements are now imposed in all public hospitals. "Members of the public are advised to avoid visiting patients in wards if they have fever, or have close contact with patients with respiratory symptoms in countries or areas with possible transmission of novel coronavirus infection," the spokesman said.

Visitors of public hospitals are also required to wear masks in all clinical areas and to wash hands before and after visiting hospitals.

The HA will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

Traffic enforcement operation against illegal parking in New Territories South Region

New Territories South Region will conduct a traffic enforcement operation against illegal parking in Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Sha Tin, Airport and Lantau police districts, from tomorrow (January 22) to January 24, with a view to ensuring road safety and smooth traffic flow.

Stringent enforcement action will be taken during the operation. The Police will issue fixed penalty tickets to drivers, who park their vehicles illegally, particularly those involve double parking, parking at restricted zones (especially near bus stops and crossing facilities) and obstructing vehicle entrances.

The Police will issue multiple tickets and take summons action against drivers who have contravened illegal parking regulations, obstructed traffic flow or caused danger to other road users. Illegally parked vehicles will also be towed away if necessary.

TAC briefed on Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme and discussed Star Ferry fare increase application

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed today (January 21) on the implementation of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme and the review

direction. The application for fare increases by the "Star" Ferry Company, Limited (Star Ferry) for the Central – Tsim Sha Tsui and Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui routes was also discussed.

The Government launched the non-means tested Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme (the Scheme) on January 1, 2019, to relieve the fare burden of commuters who travel on local public transport services for daily commuting and whose public transport expenses are relatively high. The Scheme covers the Mass Transit Railway, franchised buses, green minibuses, ferries and trams, as well as designated routes of red minibuses, non-franchised buses providing residents' services or employees' services and Kaitos approved by the Transport Department.

To further alleviate commuters' fare burden arising from increasing public transport expenses, the Government has enhanced the Scheme from January 1, 2020, by increasing the subsidy rate of the Scheme from one-fourth to one-third of the monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$400 as well as raising the subsidy cap from \$300 to \$400 per month. The level of monthly public transport expenses is maintained at \$400.

In the first year of the Scheme's implementation, the total subsidy amount was about \$1.9 billion, representing a monthly average subsidy amount of about \$160 million, with the average number of beneficiaries per month about 2.2 million. With an additional annual subsidy amount of around \$800 million arising from the enhancement of the Scheme, the estimated annual subsidy amount will increase from around \$2.3 billion to around \$3.1 billion and the average number of beneficiaries per month will remain around 2.2 million.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members are pleased to note that the Scheme has been operating smoothly and has been well received by the public since its launch. Members also welcome that the Government has suitably raised the subsidy rate and subsidy cap of the Scheme to further alleviate the fare burden of commuters."

Members noted that at the start of this year, the Government has kick-started the review of the Scheme to examine its operational arrangements for providing greater convenience to the general public. The review is expected to be complete in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Referring to the application for fare increases by Star Ferry for the Central – Tsim Sha Tsui and Wan Chai – Tsim Sha Tsui routes, Professor Cheung said, "Members note the operation and financial performance of Star Ferry. In deliberating Star Ferry's application, Members have considered and balanced all relevant factors, including the financial viability of the two franchised ferry routes and public acceptability."

The TAC will submit its recommendation to the Government for consideration by the Chief Executive in Council.

Consumer Price Indices for December 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (January 21) the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures for December 2019. According to the Composite CPI, overall consumer prices rose by 2.9% in December 2019 over the same month a year earlier, slightly smaller than the corresponding increase (3.0%) in November 2019. The smaller increase in December was mainly due to the smaller increases in local transport fares as well as the costs for meals bought away from home. 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 December 2019 was also 2.9%, remaining virtually unchanged as compared to November 2019.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the average monthly rate of increase in the Composite CPI for the three-month period ending December 2019 was 0.1%, the same as that for the three-month period ending November 2019. Netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures, the corresponding rates of increase were both 0.1%.

Analysed by sub-index, the year-on-year rates of increase in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 3.4%, 2.9% and 2.5% respectively in December 2019, as compared to 3.5%, 2.9% and 2.5% respectively in November 2019. 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 3.5%, 2.7% and 2.4% respectively in December 2019, as compared to 3.6%, 2.8% and 2.4% respectively in November 2019.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, for the three-month period ending December 2019, the average monthly rates of increase in the seasonally adjusted CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were all 0.1%. The corresponding rates of increase for the three-month period ending November 2019 were 0.1%, 0.1% 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 December 2019 were all 0.1%, and the corresponding rates of increase for the three-month period ending November 2019 were 0.1%, 0.1% and 0.2% respectively.

Amongst the various components of the Composite CPI, year-on-year increases in prices were recorded in December 2019 for food (excluding meals bought away from home) (13.8%), miscellaneous goods (3.4%), housing (3.0%), meals bought away from home (2.0%), miscellaneous services (1.6%) and transport (1.6%).

On the other hand, year-on-year decreases in the components of the Composite CPI were recorded in December 2019 for electricity, gas and water

(-6.6%); clothing and footwear (-3.1%); durable goods (-2.2%) as well as alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-1.3%).

In the fourth quarter of 2019, the Composite CPI rose by 3.0% over a year earlier, while the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) rose by 3.4%, 2.9% and 2.6% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 3.0%, 3.6%, 2.9% and 2.5% respectively.

For 2019 as a whole, the Composite CPI was on average 2.9% higher than that in the preceding 12-month period. The respective increases in the CPI(A), CPI(B) and CPI(C) were 3.3%, 2.7% and 2.6% respectively. The corresponding increases after netting out the effects of all Government's one-off relief measures were 3.0%, 3.5%, 2.8% and 2.6% respectively.

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the underlying consumer price inflation rate held stable at 2.9% in December 2019. While price pressures on most major CPI components stayed modest or moderate, food inflation remained notable amid elevated fresh pork prices. For 2019 as a whole, the underlying consumer price inflation rate averaged 3.0%.

Looking ahead, mild imported inflation and subdued local economic conditions should help contain overall inflationary pressures in the near term. 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 December 2019 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 December 2019 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).