

SCMA to visit Macao and Zhuhai

The Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, will visit Macao and Zhuhai tomorrow (June 6).

Mr Nip will depart for Macao in the morning to meet government officials of the Macao Special Administrative Region to exchange views on the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and co-operation work of the two sides.

Mr Nip will visit the Commemorative Gallery of the Macao Basic Law and inspect the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on the artificial island. He will also visit Zhuhai to learn about the latest developments and return to Hong Kong in the evening on the same day.

Interest rate of sixth interest payment for iBond Series due 2019

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government), announces today (June 5) the relevant per annum interest rate for the sixth interest payment of iBond Series due 2019 (Issue Number 03GB1906R; Stock Code: 4231) (the Bonds) issued under the Retail Bond Issuance Programme of the Government Bond Programme.

According to the Issue Circular dated May 19, 2016 for the Bonds, the sixth interest payment of the Bonds is scheduled to be made on June 20, 2019, and the relevant interest rate is scheduled to be determined and announced on June 5, 2019 as the higher of the prevailing Floating Rate and Fixed Rate.

On June 5, 2019, the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate are as follows:

Floating Rate: +2.43 per cent (Annex)

Fixed Rate: +1.00 per cent

Based on the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate set out above, the relevant interest rate for the sixth interest payment is determined and announced as 2.43 per cent per annum.

LCQ9: General Chinese Charities Fund and Emergency Relief Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Kwong Chun-yu and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

Persons who have been affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs may apply to the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) or the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) for financial assistance. Some victims affected by last year's super typhoon Mangkhut have relayed to me that after the passage of the typhoon, the District Offices (DOs) of their respective districts did not deploy staff to publicise to them that they might apply to the two Funds for assistance, and the victims became aware of it only through word of mouth. Moreover, although the victims' accommodation suffered damage to varying extent, the amount of relief granted to them under GCCF was \$3,000 across the board. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the locations and manner in which the Government carried out publicity activities on the two Funds at the district level in the past three years; the channels and procedures for application for the two Funds, and the documents which applicants are required to submit;

(2) in respect of each of the two Funds, of the respective numbers of applications from Mangkhut-affected victims, which were received, approved and rejected by the Government, the average time taken for the vetting and approval of such applications, and the total amount of relief grants approved; the reasons for some applications being rejected;

(3) of the considerations and criteria based on which DOs in the various districts assess, for determining the amount of relief grant, the financial hardship faced by the applicants applying for assistance under GCCF; whether those considerations and criteria include the extent of damage to the applicants' accommodation; if not, whether the home visit procedure can be dispensed with in order to expedite the payment of grants;

(4) of the date on which the Home Affairs Department last adjusted the ceiling of relief grant under GCCF and the criteria adopted for that; whether the Government will review and raise that ceiling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of (i) the total amount of donations received from members of the public and (ii) the total amount of grants approved, by the Government in respect of

ERF in the past five years?

Reply:

President,

The reply (prepared in consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and other relevant departments) to the Hon Kwong Chun-yu's question is as follows:

(1) General Chinese Charities Fund

The objective of the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) is to provide emergency relief to Hong Kong residents who are affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs. District Offices (DOs) of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) would disseminate information about the GCCF to people affected after the occurrence of natural disasters or accidents, including assisting residents in completing and submitting the GCCF application forms. Some DOs have posted notices or publicised the funds in collaboration with district organisations. People affected can submit the applications for relief grant under GCCF to respective DOs. DOs have to vet each and every GCCF application. Depending on the circumstances of individual application, DOs may request relevant information, e.g. identification document, income proof, etc. for assessing the financial hardship of the applicants and determining the level of relief grant.

Emergency Relief Fund

The Emergency Relief Fund Ordinance, Chapter 1103 of the Laws of Hong Kong, provides for the establishment and administration of a trust fund known as the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF). The ERF is vested in the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated as Trustee. It aims to provide financial assistance for persons who are in need of urgent relief as a result of fire, flooding, tempest, landslide, typhoon or other natural disasters. Grants from the ERF are intended for relief rather than compensation. The responsibility for approving grants and making payments is, in most cases, vested in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Marine Department (MD), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Lands Department (LandsD), while the HAD is responsible for overall co-ordination at the district level. There are five types of grants under the ERF:

	Type of grants	Operating department
A	Grants in respect of death or personal injury	SWD

B	Domestic re-accommodation, re-equipment, site formation and repair grants and grant for severe damage to home appliances	LandsD In the case of dwelling vessels, investigation and verification by MD and payment by LandsD
C	Grants to repair or replace vessels and fishing gear	MD for working boats and dwelling vessels AFCD for fishing boats and gear
D	Primary producer grants 1. Stock houses and farm buildings destroyed or severely damaged 2. Rehabilitation grants for loss of crops, livestock or cultured fish	LandsD AFCD
E	Special grants	Operating department(s) concerned

On the ERF, the publicity means and efforts by respective operating departments in the districts in the past three years, as well as the means, procedures and documents required for application for the ERF are at Annex 1.

(2) The number of applications received, approved, rejected/withdrawn, reasons for rejected applications and the total amount of payments approved under the two funds after the onslaught of super typhoon Mangkhut in Hong Kong are at Annex 2.

D0s have to process each and every GCCF application. As the nature and circumstances vary from case to case of individual application, there is no standard processing time.

For ERF, the operating departments do not have statistics on the average time taken for processing such applications. In general, the processing time of applications for each type of grants under the ERF is set out at Annex 3. All operating departments had vetted applications within the designated timeframe.

(3) When processing GCCF applications, D0s will take into account the nature and circumstances of individual application, e.g. financial situation of the applicant, and whether the applicant has obtained another source of aid, etc., to assess the financial hardship of the people affected, and the urgency of their need for assistance, with a view to determining the level of relief grant. As the circumstances vary from case to case, D0s may need to conduct home visits when necessary.

(4) With reference to the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)), the HAD raised

the ceiling of relief grant to \$8,000 in 2000. Having considered that the ceiling of relief grant has not been adjusted for many years, the HAD is now reviewing the ceiling of relief grant based on the changes in CPI(A).

(5) In the past five years, no donation to the ERF from the public was received, and the total amount of grants approved under the ERF during the period is at Annex 4.

Special traffic arrangements for Tuen Ng Festival

Police will implement special traffic arrangements in various districts on June 7 (Friday) to facilitate the public to watch dragon boat races and to ensure smooth vehicular traffic movement and pedestrian safety.

Southern District

A. Road closure

In Aberdeen, Kwun Hoi Path near Ocean Court will be closed between 7am and 6pm, except for vehicles of local residents.

In Stanley, Stanley Link Road and Hoi Fung Path will be closed between 6am and 7pm, except for vehicles of local residents.

Stanley New Street and Stanley Market Road will be closed between 7am and 6pm, except for vehicles of local residents and vehicles with permit.

Stanley Main Street will be closed between 7am and 11pm and designated as pedestrian precinct.

B. Suspension of parking spaces

The public car park near the refuse collection point on Stanley Beach Road and all parking spaces on Stanley Link Road will be suspended from 6am on June 6 to 7pm the following day.

All metered parking spaces and motorcycle parking spaces on Island Road, except for disabled parking spaces, will be suspended from 6am to 7pm.

Tuen Mun

The following roads will be closed from 7am to 3pm, except for permitted vehicles:

- A section of the unnamed access road connecting Wu Shan Road (near Wu Hong Street) between its cul-de-sac and the entrance of the open-air car park; and
- The unnamed access road connecting Wu Shan Road (opposite to Wu Shan Bowling Green).

Tai Po

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A. Road closure

The following roads will be closed from 6pm on June 6 to 2pm the following day, except for taxis and permitted vehicles:

- Dai King Street;
- Dai Hei Street; and
- Dai Kwai Street between Dai Cheong Street and Tai Po Waterfront Park.

B. Closure of cycling track

The cycling track inside Tai Po Waterfront Park near Tai Po Industrial Estate will be closed from 7am to 2pm.

C. Suspension of parking spaces

The metered car park on Dai Shing Street and the metered parking spaces on Dai Hei Street and Dai King Street will be suspended from 6pm on June 6 to 2pm the following day, except for permitted vehicles.

Sha Tin

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A. Road closure

Sand Martin Bridge (Sha Tin Rural Committee Road between Yuen Wo Road and Tai Chung Kiu Road) will be closed from 7.30am to 2.30pm. Vehicles crossing Shing Mun River must travel via Lion Bridge (Lion Rock Tunnel Road) or Banyan Bridge (Fo Tan Road between Yuen Wo Road and Tai Chung Kiu Road).

B. Closure of cycling track

The cycling track along the northern riverside of Shing Mun River Channel between Sand Martin Bridge and Banyan Bridge will be closed from 7.30am to 2.30pm.

All vehicles parked illegally may be towed away without prior notice.

Actual implementation of the traffic arrangements will be made depending on traffic and crowd conditions in the areas. Motorists are advised to exercise tolerance and patience and take heed of instructions of the Police on site.

LCQ21: Disposal of waste medicine from households

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

Under the existing legislation, the storage, collection, transport and disposal of chemical waste must comply with the relevant regulations. As only waste medicine and injections generated by healthcare institutions such as hospitals and clinics are classified as chemical waste, the disposal of waste medicine from households is not regulated. It is learnt that at present, members of the public generally throw their leftover medicine into toilet bowls or discard them together with domestic waste, which is then transported to landfills. It has been reported that according to the findings of a study conducted last year, the samples of leachate taken from three landfills generally contained human antibiotics, at levels exceeding the limits by five to 53 times. The researcher concerned has pointed out that leachate, after treatment, still contains antibiotic residues which, upon discharge into the sea, will affect the marine ecosystem and enter the human food chain, resulting in the development of antibiotics-resistant microorganisms. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, in the light of the findings of the aforesaid study, review and tighten the existing regulation on the disposal of waste medicine from households; if it will tighten the regulation, of the specific measures; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will, by drawing reference from the experience of overseas countries, explore the implementation of a trial scheme on collection of waste medicine from households (e.g. setting up collection boxes for drugs); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will conduct an in-depth study on the amounts of pharmaceutical residues in the environment and their impacts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Responses of the Environment Bureau to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Michael Tien are as follows:

The landfills in operation in Hong Kong are installed with multi-layer

composite liner system covering the entire base area. All leachate (i.e. the sources of wastewater samples taken for the study mentioned in the question) arising from decomposition of landfilled waste is collected, treated and discharged into public sewers according to statutory standards, and released via sewage treatment works managed by the Drainage Services Department (DSD). According to the research conducted by the DSD, the sewage treatment works in Hong Kong can effectively remove some of the pharmaceutical residues in the sewage, including antibiotics, as similarly concluded in related overseas research findings. Therefore, the amount of the pollutants, including antibiotics that may be present in the effluent will have been greatly reduced after the aforementioned treatment procedures.

Furthermore, the World Health Organization published a research report on the issue of residual pharmaceuticals in the environment in 2012, pointing out that the level of pharmaceuticals remaining in the environment is normally low, and the amounts in drinking water sources generally do not pose any risk to human health. According to the studies published by local academics in 2016 and 2018, the concentrations of antibiotics detected in river waters of Hong Kong were generally low, and were lower than that in various rivers of Europe, North America, Australia, and the Pearl River of China. It is believed that the trace amounts of antibiotics that have been discharged into the sea via Hong Kong's rivers present a very low impact on the marine environment and are unlikely to have any effect on public health.

Making reference to the current scientific findings on environmental waters, and the treatment, discharge arrangement and standards for landfill leachate in Hong Kong, as well as the fact that since antibiotics prescribed by doctors generally need to be finished in total by the patients and the actual amount of unconsumed pharmaceuticals containing antibiotics that are mixed with household waste or in domestic sewage is very small, the associated environmental pollution or the impact on human health would be very mild. The Government therefore considers that currently there is no need to regulate the disposal of waste medicine from households or implement a trial scheme on its collection. Nevertheless, together with the Food and Health Bureau, the Environment Bureau will continue to keep in view international research and advancement in antibiotic issues, and the Environment Bureau will also review the need for a more in-depth study on residual pharmaceuticals in the environment according to the developments.