

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Tuesday, July 2, 2024 is 106.9 (up 0.1 against last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, June 29, 2024 was 106.8 (down 0.1 against last Friday's index).

Outreach Music Interest Courses open for applications

Outreach Music Interest Courses (OMICs) organised by the Music Office of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) are now open for applications. Members of the public are welcome to apply for an array of courses, ranging from Chinese and Western musical instrument foundation classes to music workshops, which will be held from September to February next year.

Introductory courses available include harmonica, little harp, keyboard, classical vocal singing, classical guitar and ukulele. Instrumental enrichment courses include erhu, zheng, pipa and violin. There are also ensemble training of Chinese and Western music, music theory (Grades 1 and 2) and aural training. The course fees range from \$290 to \$1,200.

Other Chinese and Western musical instrument foundation classes will cover erhu, pipa, zhongruan, yangqin, zheng, dizi, xiao, violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, saxophone and percussion (glockenspiel and practice pad). The course fee is \$1,280 each.

With a soothing sound, the handpan is often used in meditation and relaxation exercises. In the "Introduction to Handpan Playing", a new course of OMICs, participants will learn the correct posture and basic techniques of playing the handpan and reading numbered musical notations and musical staves. The course welcomes adults and does not require any musical qualifications or performance experience.

Another new course, "Keyboard Playing (Numbered Musical Notation)", will teach participants numbered musical notation reading skills, melody-playing techniques and simple chord applications. The course welcomes adults who have completed the "Introduction to Keyboard Playing (Foundation I)" course organised by the Music Office, or those who have acquired basic keyboard playing skills with both hands. The fees of the two new courses are \$800 and \$580 respectively.

â€œIn addition, the Music Office will offer "iPad Music Making", a workshop for adults to enjoy music making by using the free music app GarageBand; and "ABCs of Musicianship", an online course designed for adult beginners. The fees of the courses are \$800 and \$385 respectively.

â€œAll OMICs are conducted in Cantonese. The courses will be held at different venues across the territory, namely Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Sha Tin Town Hall, Tuen Mun Town Hall, North District Town Hall, Sheung Wan Civic Centre, Ngau Chi Wan Civic Centre, Kwai Tsing Theatre, Yuen Long Theatre, Ko Shan Theatre, Hong Kong Central Library and the Music Office's music centres in Wan Chai, Mong Kok, Kwun Tong, Sha Tin and Tsuen Wan. Participants of the online course "ABCs of Musicianship" are required to prepare their own electronic device equipped with a wireless or broadband data connection, a webcam and Zoom software in advance.

â€œOnline applications are now available on the Music Office website (www.lcsd.gov.hk/musicoffice). Course prospectuses and application forms are also available at various performance venues of the LCSD and music centres of the Music Office. The deadline for applications is July 25. Oversubscribed courses will be processed by ballot. For courses not fully taken up after the first round of application, places will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis from August 21 onwards.

â€œFor enquiries, please call 3842 7773, 2598 0801 or 2598 8335 or email to outreachmusic@lcsd.gov.hk.

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (July 2):

Reporter: Good morning, Mr Lee, some English questions. Firstly, with regards to the pandas that will be coming to Hong Kong in the next few months, could the Government provide perhaps some more details about these animals, such as whether the animals would be a male and female pair like the previous time? When would they arrive? And also, what are some of the predicted economic and tourism benefits of these pandas coming to Hong Kong? The second question, about the increase of the duty-free limit for Mainland Chinese tourists, there has been some criticism that the amount is not high enough or attractive enough compared to those in Hainan. What would you think of some of these comments? How would you respond to the low numbers of visitors coming to Hong Kong following this increase? And would you appeal for the Central Government to consider raising or adjusting the limit to a higher one later in the future? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I know everybody is very excited by the likely and soon arrival of the pair of giant pandas. I thank again sincerely the Central Authorities for considering my proposal and having agreed to provide a pair of giant pandas for Hong Kong as a gift. I think the important thing is to ensure that the arrangements for the giant pandas' arrival will be smooth and safe, because I know that there will be quarantine requirements, and all the necessary procedures need to be followed. We have experience of receiving the gifts of giant pandas from the Central Authorities, and Ocean Park has been doing an excellent job in ensuring that they are well taken care of. What is important now, I think, is to ensure that we will actually carry out all the procedures as quickly as possible. I would like to see the Hong Kong Government delegation to make the trip as soon as possible to Sichuan, so that we can immediately discuss all the arrangements. We have experience in the two kind offers by the Central Authorities of giant pandas, but then we also have to ensure that all arrangements will be smoothly carried out. I know everybody will be interested to know of the details as soon as they are available. We will work hard on that, and I have been talking to the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism to ensure that things will proceed as quickly as possible. We will make an announcement of the details once they are available. Everybody is excited, and I am excited as well. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the Central Authorities again for the kind offer of this pair of giant pandas as a gift to Hong Kong, and I hope that we will be seeing their arrival within a few months.

As regards the different measures that have been introduced to support the economic development of Hong Kong, the Central Authorities have kindly raised the duty-free amount for Mainland resident tourists to RMB15,000. This has been achieved after a lot of efforts by different ministries and authorities of the Central Government. I think it is important that we make good use of the new arrangement, so that the benefits will be realised to its best potential. There have been a series of measures to support Hong Kong. They all add together to help Hong Kong and to ensure that economic development and prosperity will be realised in Hong Kong, and they will have an amplification effect and also will synergise to help Hong Kong as a whole. It is important for us Hong Kong people, the Government included of course, to capitalise on and make good use of all the different measures and ensure that they realise their best potential in Hong Kong. That includes the Government and everybody in different sectors, to ensure that all the experiences, all the services and all the new responses, new arrangements and new offers by different sectors will be attractive, will offer a good experience, and will help visitors to have a good experience while they stay in Hong Kong. I urge everyone to really grasp and capitalise on these opportunities.

One thing I would like to add, and that is really from my heart, is Hong Kong is now at a stage of transition, different sectors of our economy will have to face new challenges because of the fast-changing economic situation around us. It is good news because there will be special areas where we can make use of, for example, scientific advances to help us to produce more, but there are also changes we need to accept, as we have gone through previously

many times. Our previous success means that we can build and make success ourselves. We can't rest on our own laurels to just think of present success or past successes. All these successes tell us that we can make success and we can make success while the economic structure is changing every day. I urge everybody to think of innovative ways to capitalise on the new measures that have been offered to Hong Kong and, in this changing world, particularly in relation to business characteristics and also new economic environment, to build success again, as we have done many times in building our previous successes. I urge everyone to work hard to capitalise on all these measures and think of new ways to ensure Hong Kong will become another great success story.

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

Invest Hong Kong reports good increase in number of companies assisted for first six months of year

Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) today (July 2) announced that the department had assisted 322 Mainland and overseas companies to set up or expand their business in Hong Kong during the first six months of the year.

The number represents a year-on-year rise of 43 per cent. The total investment brought to Hong Kong's economy has reached HK\$38.3 billion and created more than 3 500 job opportunities, up 6 per cent and 44 per cent respectively on a year-on-year basis.

The Director-General of Investment Promotion, Ms Alpha Lau, is delighted to see that the department's portfolio continues to grow. Ms Lau said, "I am glad to see the continuous growth of our portfolio. This is attributable to the gradual recovery of the global economy and the continuous support by our country, hence accelerating the pace of companies expanding their business to Hong Kong."

She added, "Hong Kong by many measures is the most sought-after global financial and business hub in Asia. For the second half of the year, we will continue to promote the city's strengths according to our targets. Financial services, innovation and technology and family offices are among some of the priority sectors. Geographically InvestHK will enhance our promotion drive in strategic markets, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations economies and the Middle East and North Africa region, maximising Hong Kong's advantages as a 'super connector' and a 'super value-adder'."

2024 mid-year results: highlights

The 322 companies came from 33 economies. The Mainland continued to lead with 150 companies, followed by the United States (30), United Kingdom (19), Singapore (18) and France (15).

In terms of sectors, the portfolio covered a broad spectrum ranging from financial services and fintech (77), followed by innovation and technology (61), family office (52), business and professional services (33), and consumer products (29).

The portfolio included 47 companies along the Belt and Road economies (excluding those from Mainland China).

[Acclaimed Zhejiang Wu Opera Research Centre returns in July to perform at inaugural Chinese Culture Festival \(with photos\)](#)

Having received critical acclaim for its performances in Hong Kong last year, the Zhejiang Wu Opera Research Centre will return to the city and stage three stunning Wu opera performances in late July at the inaugural Chinese Culture Festival (CCF), organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Winners of the China Theatre Plum Blossom Award Yang Xiayun and Lou Sheng will lead promising young artists to present a grand new production "Sun Wu Kong Thrice Beat the Bony Demon" for its Hong Kong debut. The classic repertoire "Mu Guiying" and a selection of excerpts will also be performed, offering audiences the experience of Wu opera with its blend of traditional and modern elements, as well as a harmonious balance of strength and tenderness. This programme is one of the highlights of the 12th Chinese Opera Festival.

Wu opera, also known as Jinhua opera, is the second major regional operatic genre of Zhejiang Province and is popular in Jinhua and its surrounding areas. It was named after Jinhua's former name, Wuzhou. The performance style of Wu opera is rugged and exaggerated, making it particularly effective in conveying an imposing atmosphere and intense emotions through exciting martial sequences and dance. Advocating the feature of "crossing the line between the martial and the civil repertoires", Wu opera showcases the balance of boldness and tenderness, as well as a mix of strength and delicateness. The distinctive artistic charm of Wu opera has earned its inclusion on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage at National Level.

"Sun Wu Kong Thrice Beat the Bony Demon", the latest hit of the troupe that is adapted from the classic story "Journey to the West", will be played at the first performance. Lou Sheng, who portrays Monk Tripitaka, will demonstrate an unconventional version of the role with martial movements, including somersaults and jumping, showcasing his excellence in both civil and martial roles. Yang Xiayun, on the other hand, will portray the charming and cunning Bony Demon, engaging in several fierce duels with the Monkey King performed by Zhou Hongwei, an outstanding post-90s artist of the troupe. Through astonishing techniques and stunts, the cast will display the iconic style of the Wu opera genre with a lively pace as well as a blazing and intense style.

The second performance will feature a selection of five operatic excerpts for different roles, presenting the traditional singing and martial arts sequences in Wu opera with its character of "crossing the line between the martial and the civil repertoires" by the new generation of talented performers. "Killing Cai Yang" from "Sworn Brother's Reunion at the Old City", a bespoke part for actors in hongsheng (red-faced male) roles, displays a high level of acting skills including eye expressions and stylised bodily movements by the performers. "Hanging Up the Portrait" is an act for the xiaohuadan (young female) character, in which she expresses her excitement and nervousness before the arrival of her lover through stunts using a chair and handkerchief. "In the Prison Cell" from "Two Magical Gold Seals", a xiaosheng (young male) uses traditional Chinese operatic skills to depict movements such as falling into a well, paddling, climbing and pulling on a rope, vividly presenting the scenario of him being stuck in a water dungeon. In "A Bowl of Rice Noodles Outside the Window", audiences will witness the bravura singing between a xiaosheng and a guimendan (high-born lady). In the final excerpt, a wusheng (martial male) piece "Burning Zidu Alive", the main character Zidu will externalise his fear and terror through the use of Wu operatic "face-changing" tricks such as "wiping" and "blowing".

The final performance will be the full-length production "Mu Guiying" packed with youthful elements. Yang Xiayun will once again act as Mu Guiying in daomadan (female warrior) role, and develop a passionate romance with Yang Zongbao played by Lou Sheng. In the play, Yang Xiayun will show her versatility in acting, from portraying the tender and sweet girl in "The Encounter" to the heroine in "The Marriage" who pinpoints the weakness in the army formation while showing off her flowing-sleeves skills. "The Wedding Night" also offers a new artistic interpretation of the scene that breaks tradition. With a combination of spectacular stage design, extraordinary skills in acting and singing by the artists and a series of mass martial arts scenes, audiences will be offered a feast of Wu opera with all-rounded features.

Details of the three performances are as follows:

Date and time: July 26 (Friday), 7.30pm

"Sun Wu Kong Thrice Beat the Bony Demon"

Main cast: Zhou Hongwei, Yang Xiayun, Lou Sheng, Dong Xuyang, Liu Fuming,

Zhang Ying, Gao Qian, Sun Zishan

Synopsis: Monk Tripitaka and his disciples are on their pilgrimage to India to bring back the sacred scrolls to China. The adept, shapeshifting Skeleton Demon disguises itself three times to fulfil its desire to eat Tripitaka's flesh. Its antics are seen through by Wukong the Monkey King who "kills" its incarnated forms every time. But to Tripitaka, Wukong's acts are repeated manslaughter, and he angrily sends him away. Tripitaka and the other disciples then fall into the clutches of the demon. Putting his grudges aside, Wukong goes to save his master.

Date and time: July 27 (Saturday), 7.30pm

Excerpt "Killing Cai Yang" from "Sworn Brothers' Reunion at the Old City"

Main cast: Li Xuanyu

Synopsis: The three sworn brothers, Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, are separated after the Battle of Xuzhou. Guan Yu is trapped and temporarily stays in Cao Cao's camp. After learning of Liu Bei's whereabouts, Guan Yu heads straight for the old city where Zhang Fei resides. However, Zhang Fei suspects that Guan Yu has already surrendered to Cao Cao and refuses to open the city gates. Cao Cao's general Cai Yang, who is hunting down Guan Yu, arrives at the scene. The exhausted Guan Yu kills Cai Yang to prove his allegiance to Liu Bei. Zhang Fei welcomes Guan Yu into the city and offers his apologies.

Excerpt "Hanging Up the Portrait"

Main cast: Wu Qingfei

Synopsis: During a spring outing to the outskirts of the city, Yelu Hanyan runs into the handsome Hua Yun and falls in love. Hanyan falls ill with lovesickness, and receives help from Hua Yun's mother. They devise a plan for Hua Yun to disguise himself as a woman and visit Hanyan at her residence. Hanyan decorates her room and waits for Hua Yun to arrive.

Excerpt "In the Prison Cell" from "Two Magical Gold Seals"

Main cast: Lou Sheng, Chen Lili

Synopsis: Xu Qing, a young and newly appointed inspector, disguises himself to investigate a case in Wenzhou. He is recognised by Wang Chengming, the son of a high-ranking official, and thrown into a water dungeon. Xu is rescued by the commoner girl Ding Meihua and escapes from the water dungeon.

Excerpt "A Bowl of Rice Noodles Outside the Window"

Main cast: Chen Jianxu, Lou Yiting

Synopsis: Gao Wenju, a scholar from Luoyang, bids farewell to his wife Jin Zhen and travels to the capital for the imperial examination. They each keep half a pearl as a token of their love. After Gao is named the top scholar, he is forced by Prime Minister Wen Ge to marry his daughter. He sends a letter to ask Jin to come to the capital, but Lady Wen changes it to a letter of divorce. Jin goes to the capital to search for her husband, and is locked up in the rear courtyard of the Prime Minister's residence. Fortunately, with the help of the old maidservant Duniang, Jin manages to send Gao a bowl of rice noodles on the evening of the Mid-Autumn Festival. Gao is surprised by the familiar taste, and when he finds half a pearl inside the noodles, he

realises that it must belong to Jin. The two meet up at night and sort out their misunderstandings.

Excerpt "Burning Zidu Alive"

Main cast: Sun Zishan

Synopsis: The states of Zheng and Xu are at war. Zidu, the grandson of the Duke of Zheng, kills his commander Ying Kaoshu with an arrow from the dark to take credit for their victory. After the army returns to the capital, Zidu becomes terrified and anxious. At the celebratory banquet, Zidu starts seeing and hearing things and nearly goes insane. In the end, he takes his own life.

Date and time: July 28 (Sunday), 7.30pm

"Mu Guiying"

Main cast: Yang Xiayun, Lou Sheng, Chen Jianxu, Li Xuanyu, Gao Qian, Chen Xiaojian, Wu Yanxing, Liu Fuming, Song Baoduan

Synopsis: During the Song dynasty, the Liao army invades the borders and sets up the Heavenly Gate Formation. Despite repeated attempts, Yang Yanzhao and his son Yang Zongbao are unable to defeat them. Zongbao goes to Mount Wutai to find someone who can break through the formation. When passing by the Muke Fortress, he is captured by Mu Guiying, the leader of the fortress, and brought into the fortress. Mu, who is well-versed in military formations and has a strong sense of patriotism, develops feelings for Zongbao. She points out the secret to breaking the formation to Zongbao and draws him a plan. The two agree to hold a wedding, and then have Mu lead the local militia to help break through the formation. Yang Yanzhao learns that his son has married without approval, and orders Zongbao to be tied up and executed at the entrance of the camp. Mu is shocked by the news and rushes to the commander's tent. In the end, she hands over the plans, and the couple join forces to break the formation.

Founded as the Zhejiang Wu Opera Theatre Company in 1956, the Zhejiang Wu Opera Research Centre has been reviving and exploring the traditional art of Wu opera. The troupe has nurtured a number of outstanding artists, including winners of the Plum Blossom Award. It has created and performed several distinguished plays. Many of them were awarded in the national Chinese opera showcase, and have been staged in numerous countries and regions across Europe and Asia.

The three performances will be held at the Auditorium of Sha Tin Town Hall. Lyrics and dialogue are with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$180, \$280, \$380 and \$480 are now available at URB TIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.ccf.gov.hk/en/programme/zhejiang-wu-opera-research-centre/.

The programme will also feature two meet-the-artists sessions (in Putonghua), entitled "The Legacy and Development of the Art of Contemporary Wu Opera" to be held at 7.30pm on July 25 (Thursday) and "The Dissemination and Development of Zhejiang Wu Opera Research Centre" to be held at 2.30pm on July 27 (Saturday). Both sessions will be held at AC2, Level 4,

Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The speakers include the troupe's performer Yang Xiayun and its deputy director Xie Linghui, while Chinese opera researcher Chan Chun-miu will be the moderator. Admission is free and online registration is required (www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/chinese_opera/programs_1716.html#tab_13_0). Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The CCF, presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and organised by the LCSd's Chinese Culture Promotion Office, aims to enhance the public's appreciation of Chinese culture and cultivate citizens' national identity and cultural confidence. The inaugural CCF is held from June to September. Through different performing arts programmes in various forms and related extension activities, including selected programmes of the Chinese Opera Festival, exemplary local arts projects recognised by the China National Arts Fund, performing arts programmes from arts and cultural organisations, film screenings, exhibitions, talks and more, the festival allows members of the public and visitors to experience the broad and profound Chinese culture with a view to promoting Chinese culture and patriotic education as well as enhancing national identity among the people of Hong Kong, making contributions to the steadfast and successful implementation of "one country, two systems". For details, please visit the CCF website www.ccf.gov.hk.

The LCSd has long been promoting Chinese history and culture through organising an array of programmes and activities to enable the public to learn more about the broad and profound Chinese culture. For more information, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/ccpo/index.html.



