

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, June 7, 2023 is 103.6 (up 0.2 against yesterday's index).

SJ to visit Guangzhou and Shenzhen

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, will lead a delegation comprising 20 representatives from the Hong Kong legal sector to depart tomorrow (June 8) for a visit to Guangzhou and Shenzhen, with a view to further promoting Hong Kong-Guangdong and Shenzhen-Hong Kong co-operation on legal matters, and contributing to the building of the rule of law in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

This is Mr Lam's first visit to the Mainland cities in the GBA since taking office. Mr Lam and the delegation will call on the People's Government of Guangdong Province, the Guangzhou Intellectual Property Court, the Guangzhou Internet Court, the Nansha International Arbitration Centre, the First International Commercial Court of the Supreme People's Court and the Shenzhen Qianhai Cooperation Zone People's Court. Mr Lam will also meet with senior officials of the High People's Court of Guangdong Province and the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court, and visit the headquarters of Tencent.

In addition, the delegation will participate in roundtable meetings respectively with the Guangzhou Intellectual Property Court and the Shenzhen Qianhai Cooperation Zone People's Court to exchange views and explore further co-operation on important issues of mutual interest such as the latest developments in the law on intellectual property rights in the Mainland and Hong Kong, the implementation of the initiative of allowing Hong Kong enterprises to adopt Hong Kong law and the practical issues relating to the proof of Hong Kong laws in Hong Kong-related cases.

Mr Lam said that the objective of this visit is to lead the representatives of the Hong Kong legal sector to see for themselves and further understand the latest developments in the Mainland legal system and the role and opportunities of the GBA as the leading area on China's path to modernisation. It is hoped that the relevant visits and thematic exchanges will create favourable conditions for the legal sector to share their practical experience with Mainland stakeholders and to jointly explore how the Hong Kong legal sector can further contribute to the high-quality development of the GBA and the country, so as to achieve mutual benefits through synergised co-operation.

The deputy heads of the delegation are Mr Victor Dawes, SC, Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, and Mr Chan Chak-ming, President of the Law

Society of Hong Kong. Members of the delegation are composed of the Deputy Director of Intellectual Property, Mr Thomas Tsang, representatives from the Hong Kong Bar Association, the Law Society of Hong Kong, the Department of Justice and the Intellectual Property Department.

Mr Lam will conclude his visit and return to Hong Kong on June 10. During Mr Lam's absence, the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Mr Cheung Kwok-kwan, will be the Acting Secretary for Justice.

LCQ16: Provision of medical treatment to patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 7):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of confirmed cases of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Hong Kong has increased in recent months. Some confirmed patients have relayed that it is difficult to make appointments for general outpatient clinic (GOPC) services of public hospitals, and that only a small number of private doctors are willing to treat COVID-19 patients, resulting in a shortage of consultation services and long queues at private clinics in many districts. Moreover, quite a number of grass-roots people have indicated that they can hardly afford the high consultation fees or administrative fees charged by private clinics, and have no choice but to seek consultation at the accident and emergency (A&E) departments of public hospitals. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that some private clinics charge COVID-19 patients higher consultation fees, whether the Government knows the reasons and criteria for private doctors to charge COVID-19 patients additional administrative fees or consultation fees; if so, of the details, and whether it will appeal to such private doctors to charge COVID-19 patients the normal fees; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows under what circumstances the Hospital Authority (HA) will increase the GOPC consultation quotas reserved for COVID-19 patients and reopen the designated clinics for COVID-19 confirmed cases, so that the patients can receive appropriate medical treatment as early as possible;

(3) as it is learnt that some COVID-19 patients do not know how to use the

mobile application "HA Go" to make appointments for consultation services, whether the Government will assist COVID-19 patients in making mobile appointments and request HA to provide an additional on-site quota allocation arrangement; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it knows if HA will keep data on the number of COVID-19 patients seeking consultation at A&E departments, as well as their symptoms; if HA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) whether it will collect and publish information on the consultation fees, administrative fees and drug fees charged by private doctors providing medical treatment to COVID-19 patients, so as to enhance the transparency of their charges; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it has formulated measures to encourage more private doctors to provide medical treatment services for COVID-19 patients; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang is as follows:

Having regard to the development of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the Government has been summing up experiences periodically so as to continuously improve the responses on all fronts. While the virus has been evolving, the prevention and treatment capacities of the local healthcare system and the handling capacity of the society as a whole have been enhanced significantly with the concerted efforts of the whole community. The risk posed by COVID-19 to local public health has thus been significantly reduced. COVID-19 has been managed as an upper respiratory tract illness since early this year, while relevant measures are now focusing on the protection of the high-risk groups. Having taken into account the World Health Organization (WHO)'s latest advice as well as having assessed the local situation, risks and mutation of COVID-19 strains, the Government has also lowered the response level under the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance from Emergency to Alert level since May 30 this year.

At present, most of the infected persons, especially those who have been vaccinated for COVID-19, are mild cases. Symptomatic citizens may directly attend medical consultations at private doctors/clinics or the General Out-patient Clinics (GOPCs) under the HA. Visiting Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments or public hospitals is not necessary, so as to focus relevant public healthcare resources on attending to patients with more urgent or severe conditions. As for public GOPCs, having regard to service needs, the GOPCs under the HA currently offer about 20 000 consultation quotas each day on weekdays (including consultation quotas for episodic illnesses and chronic diseases) and some consultation quotas are reserved for persons infected with

COVID-19. For A&E departments of public hospitals, 18 927 (Note) persons attended A&E departments in the past one month (i.e. April 19 to May 20) with primary diagnosis as COVID-19 and the majority were mild cases. A large number of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza patients with mild conditions visiting A&E departments inevitably poses pressure on A&E departments in handling and admitting other emergency or severe cases. The HA will continue to closely monitor the situation of each clinic and adjust consultation quotas as necessary in a timely manner to ensure that patients receive appropriate treatment. The Government does not have any plan at the current stage to re-activate designated clinics that are mainly for coping with large-scale epidemic situations.

Regarding booking of appointments, currently persons infected with COVID-19 can make an appointment for consultation service through the "BookCOVID" function of the HA's one-stop mobile app "HA Go" or the telephone appointment system of GOPCs. Most citizens can complete booking of appointment following the steps shown in the app. In addition, "HA Go" also provides assistance to those who may need it through various channels (e.g. promotion at the "HA Go" website, demonstration videos as well as frequently asked questions). Citizens can also book an appointment for other infected persons in need by using the "Book for others" option under "BookCOVID" function in "HA Go". Moreover, help desks have been set up in GOPCs to assist those who encounter difficulty in appointment booking service for GOPCs. The mobile app and telephone appointment system of GOPCs operate round-the-clock, so that patients no longer need to queue in advance at clinics for booking appointment. This not only improves the crowding problem in the clinics, but also reduces the chance of cross-infection among patients.

For private healthcare, private hospitals and doctors have been providing consultation and treatment services for persons infected with COVID-19. Since April 2022, the Government has also started to provide two COVID-19 oral drugs to private doctors for free prescription to "Eligible Persons" who are infected. As at early June, 2023, 865 doctors and 743 clinics have been given free COVID-19 oral drugs from the Government. As it is not mandatory for private doctors to upload medical diagnosis records to patients' accounts via the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (eHealth), the statistics of private doctors in treating persons infected with COVID-19 cannot be collected or compiled. However, according to the records of the COVID-19 antiviral drug register, more than 34 400 COVID-19 oral drug treatment courses were prescribed by private doctors in May 2023. To relieve the burden on public healthcare system, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH has issued a letter to doctors and medical organisations on January 6 this year, appealing to private doctors for their provision of out-patient and in-patient, or telemedicine services to persons infected with COVID-19. The CHP has also updated infection control guidelines in hospital and clinic settings and persons infected with COVID-19 may seek medical consultation at private healthcare institutions as with those with other respiratory infectious diseases.

As for the consultation and other related fees charged by private doctors for providing treatment for COVID-19 patients, the Government does

not mandate the price level, which is also the case for other diagnostic and treatment services offered by private doctors. To protect their interests, citizens should first enquire about the fee levels from private doctors before using such services.

To make every effort to safeguard public health, the Government will continue to closely monitor the latest situation and risks of COVID-19 with an emphasis on protecting high-risk groups and keep in view of the WHO's latest assessments. In fact, vaccination is one of the effective means to prevent COVID-19 and its complications, as well as to reduce hospitalisation and death cases due to infection. The Government again strongly call on citizens who have not completed the first three doses of vaccine, as well as persons from high-risk groups who have yet to receive a booster dose per experts' recommendation, to get vaccinated as early as possible for protection of themselves and their family.

Note: This is a provisional figure that will be continuously updated during processing of the records.

LCQ9: Nutrition of students' lunches

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 7):

Question:

In 2010, the Department of Health (DH) introduced the Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students (the Guidelines) to serve as reference benchmarks for providing balanced nutrition to primary and secondary students. However, the results of the Nutrient Testing of School Lunches in Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2018, which was jointly conducted by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH and the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in 2018, showed that the sodium content of samples of primary school lunch boxes was higher than the recommended intake for a seven-year-old student's lunch, and such samples also had other problems such as inadequate dietary fibre and excessive protein. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Government launched the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches in the 2017-2018 school year, with a target of reducing the average sodium content of each primary school lunch to not more than 500 milligrams in 10 years, of the implementation situation of the Scheme;

(2) apart from the sodium content, whether the DH has monitored other nutritional indicators for school lunch boxes (e.g. the fat and sugar contents, as well as the amount of energy provided); if so, of the details

(including the effectiveness);

(3) whether it has followed up the situations of excessive sodium, inadequate dietary fibre, excessive protein, etc, in primary school lunch boxes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it knows the data on the health conditions of Hong Kong school children as a whole in the past five years (e.g. the proportion of those who were overweight, the average body mass index and the physical fitness performance);

(5) whether the DH has taken measures to ensure that school lunch suppliers follow the recommendations in the Guidelines or encourage them to do so; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether the Government will consider, by making reference to the practices in other regions, setting specific recommended standards for various nutrient contents in students' diets, or working out recommended recipes that accord with students' lifestyle or social changes (e.g. adding food ingredients such as carrots and blueberries to the recommended recipes in response to the problem of rising myopia incidence) for school lunch suppliers to follow, so as to ensure that students' diets can achieve nutritional balance and meet the targets required for normal development and growth?

Reply:

President,

Healthy eating can promote school children's healthy growth and reduce the risks of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer. The Government attaches great importance to healthy eating and weight problems among school children. The Department of Health (DH) launched the EatSmart@school.hk campaign in the 2006/07 school year to raise public awareness of and attention to healthy eating of children, and to create an environment conducive to healthy eating in schools and the community. Subsequently, the DH launched the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches in the 2017/18 school year with the aim of reducing the sodium content in school lunches in a progressive manner.

The reply, in consultation with the Education Bureau (EDB), the Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB) and the DH, to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan is as follows:

(1) The DH launched the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches in the 2017/18 school year. In January 2018, the Nutrient Testing of School Lunches in Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2018 was jointly conducted by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH and the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. Lunch samples were collected randomly from primary schools in Hong Kong to examine the sodium level, amount of energy and content of major nutrients in lunches of lower primary students. Results revealed that the average sodium content of school lunches dropped from 951

milligrams in 2013 to 818 milligrams in 2018, representing an approximate 14 per cent decrease, and continuing to make progress towards the expected sodium reduction goal.

However, the provision of school lunches was seriously affected by class suspension and change in study arrangement due to the COVID-19 epidemic since the 2019/20 school year. The DH is actively following up and discussing with lunch suppliers to review the implementation of and next step for the scheme.

(2), (3) and (5) The Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches launched by the DH mainly focuses on the average sodium content of primary school lunch boxes. Apart from sodium content, the DH also attaches importance to other nutritional indicators. When conducting the Nutrient Testing of School Lunches in Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2018, the DH also reviewed the amount of energy and some of the major nutrients content of primary school lunch boxes.

Overall speaking, the results of the Nutrient Testing of School Lunches in Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2018 revealed that the energy, fats and sugar of the lunch samples tested met the recommended standards. Among them, for total fats, saturated fats, trans fats and sugars, more than 90 per cent of the lunch samples were below the upper limits of recommended intake. The average amount of trans fats and sugars per lunch decreased by seven per cent and 15 per cent respectively as compared with a similar survey in 2013. For dietary fibre, the average content was 5.1 grams, higher than the recommended intake of four grams. That said, the amount of dietary fibre in 40 per cent of the samples was lower than the recommended intake. As for protein, the average content in the lunch samples was 21.6 grams, higher than the recommended intake of 13.3 grams. Among them, the average protein content of non-vegetarian lunch samples was even 1.8 times the recommended intake, reaching 23.6 grams.

The EDB issued circulars and guidelines to call on schools to refer to the Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students and the Handbook of Selection of Lunch Suppliers issued by the DH, as well as the guidelines issued by other relevant government departments, to formulate and implement a policy on healthy eating; and to pay attention to the nutritional quality of lunches and make suitable arrangement when selecting lunch suppliers. The DH has also discussed with lunch suppliers and advised them to ensure that lunches meet the recommended nutritional requirements according to the Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students, including paying attention to the sodium level of lunches when preparing the recipes and during the cooking process, providing at least one serving of vegetables in lunches, keeping the ratio of grains, vegetables and meat in lunches at a ratio of 3:2:1, increasing the ratio of whole grains (e.g. by adding brown rice or vegetables in rice to at least 10 per cent), etc. To encourage students to adopt healthy eating habits at an early age, the DH also suggested schools to co-operate with lunch suppliers and parents to ensure that students can consume at least one serving of fruits at school every day.

Although the sodium reduction measures are voluntary, the DH also strengthened the implementation of relevant salt reduction recommendations

through the EatSmart School Accreditation Scheme (ESAS) under the EatSmart@school.hk campaign. For the application of Advanced Level Accreditation (Lunch) under the ESAS, as one of the criteria, the contract signed between the school and lunch supplier must stipulate that all lunch boxes should be prepared in accordance with the Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students issued by the DH. The DH has been encouraging schools to participate in the ESAS through different publicity channels. As at May 31, 2023, 295 primary schools (over 40 per cent of all primary schools in Hong Kong) enrolled in the ESAS and 134 of them achieved various levels of accreditation.

In addition, the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food (Committee) under the EEB is committed to promoting the message of salt and sugar reduction. At the school level, the Committee collaborates with the EDB and the DH to raise students' awareness of reducing salt and sugar intake. The DH has been reporting the progress of the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches to the Committee and receiving feedback from the Committee on the scheme.

The DH will conduct timely review in accordance with the actual situation and take corresponding follow-up actions jointly with relevant Government departments as appropriate.

(4) The Student Health Service (SHS) of the DH arranges annual health assessment for students who have enrolled in the service. Services include physical examinations, use of health assessment questionnaires to screen for psychological health and behaviour problems, face-to-face interviews, counselling, health promotion activities, etc. The detection rates of overweight (including obese) students among those who have attended annual health assessment in the past five years are tabulated below. It is worth noting that the SHS have been disrupted since early 2020 due to the COVID-19 epidemic, with changes in the number and pattern of attendances by the students using the service over the past three school years. Therefore, direct comparison of the data before and after the epidemic should be done with caution. The DH will continue to closely monitor the health conditions of students.

Detection rates of overweight (including obese) primary school students from 2017/18 to 2021/22 school year

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21*	2021/22*
Detection rates	17.6%	17.4%	19.0%	18.6%	20.6%

Notes: The definition of being overweight (including obese):

- Body weight more than 120 per cent of the median upon weight assessment by the Weight-for-Height Chart (i.e. with the weight adjusted according to the height) for male students with height between 55 and 175 cm and for female students with height between 55 and 165 cm.
- Body Mass Index reaching 25 or above for male students with height over

175cm and for female students with height over 165cm.

* Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the SHS have been disrupted since early 2020, with changes in the number and pattern of attendances by the students using the service over the past three school years.

(6) The DH launched the EatSmart@school.hk campaign since the 2006/07 school year. Nutritional guidelines on lunches for students was produced in the same year. The DH will review the guidelines regularly and revise the relevant content to suit the nutritional needs of students in Hong Kong by making reference to the recommendations made by health authorities in different places and the latest medical research findings.

LCQ21: Preventing crimes of child abduction

Following is a question by the Hon Judy Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (June 7):

Question:

It is learnt that incidents of alleged child abduction have recently occurred in a number of districts in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of reports and requests for assistance regarding alleged child abduction received by the Police in the past five years and, among them, the number of children who were successfully found;
- (2) of the number of persons arrested for allegedly to have abducted children in the past five years and, among them, the number of those who were convicted and the penalties imposed on them;
- (3) whether the Police has drawn up measures to prevent the crime of child abduction; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether the Police will consider stepping up efforts in organising talks at schools to teach school children to be aware of strangers and what they should do when they are being abducted; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Police have all along been highly concerned about child abduction and have attached great importance to these cases. All reports of child abduction will be proactively investigated and seriously handled. The reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) In combat against child abduction, related offences under the existing laws of Hong Kong are "forcible taking or detention of person, with intent to sell him or her" under section 42 and "stealing child under 14 years" under section 43 of the Offences against the Person Ordinance (Cap. 212) (OAP0) and "abduction of child or juvenile" under section 26 of the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (Cap. 213) (PCJ0).

Police statistics on criminal cases are based on the classification of cases confirmed after investigation. As for cases and convictions involving child abduction between 2018 and 2022, the Police Force received a case on "kidnapping and child stealing" that occurred in 2021. The Police detected the case and located the child involved, who sustained only minor injuries. Of the two arrested persons in the case, one was charged with two counts of "forcible taking or detention of person, with intent to sell him or her" for suspected contravention of section 42 of OAP0, and was on remand pending trial. The other arrested person was released after investigation. Among the court cases concluded in the same period, no one was prosecuted for "stealing child under 14 years" under section 43 of OAP0 or "abduction of child or juvenile" under section 26 of PCJ0.

In addition, the Police had carried out in-depth investigation into the recent reports of suspected child abduction in various districts as mentioned in the question and found that child abduction was not involved.

(3) and (4) Child abduction is a very serious offence. The Police are resolute in taking swift follow-up actions to investigate seriously any child abduction case that occurs. To allay public concerns, the Police will release details of the investigation as soon as possible and step up patrols in the vicinity of the incidents. Moreover, through Police Community Relations Officers and School Liaison Officers, the Police maintain close liaison with schools and provide them with necessary support. Talks are also organised on a regularly basis to disseminate crime prevention information to teachers and students and to advise them what to do when they need help.