

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, March 19, 2021 is 101.4 (up 0.2 against yesterday's index).

Government announces list of third cycle designated quarantine hotels

The Government announced today (March 19) the list of designated quarantine hotels for the third cycle. A total of 30 hotels will provide about 8 300 rooms in the new cycle, with the contract period running from April 21 to June 19.

A Government spokesman said, "The Government issued letters to some 2 000 hotels with valid hotel or guesthouse licences on March 4 to invite applications for enlisting as designated quarantine hotels in the third cycle. We have received applications from 70 hotels.

"Upon assessment, 30 hotels were shortlisted as designated quarantine hotels for the third cycle (see list at Annex) to provide about 8 300 rooms of various types and rates for selection by arrivals in Hong Kong from places outside China. Twenty-nine hotels on the list were designated hotels in the second cycle, while one of them is a new participant."

The spokesman added, "We will continue to provide more hotels offering lower room rates in this new cycle after considering the market demand for hotels offering different rates. The number of hotels offering room rates at \$500 or below will increase from 11 to 13 to provide more than 2 800 rooms. This represents 34 per cent of the total number of rooms in the third cycle. The number of rooms with rates at \$1,000 or below accounts for 84 per cent, providing about 7 000 rooms in total."

To further prevent importation of COVID-19 cases and reduce contact between arrivals from overseas and the local community, the Government fully implemented the Designated Quarantine Hotel Scheme and the Designated Transportation Scheme on December 22, 2020, requiring all travellers arriving from places outside China to undergo compulsory quarantine for 21 days at designated quarantine hotels according to the specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H). The first cycle of the Scheme ended on February 19, with 36 hotels providing about 12 000 rooms. In the second cycle, 36 hotels were selected as designated hotels, providing about 10 000 rooms. The contracts with these hotels in the second cycle will end on April

20.

The list of designated hotels in the third cycle and related details including room rates have been uploaded to the thematic webpage www.designatedhotel.gov.hk.

Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Bill 2021 gazetted

The Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Bill 2021 (the Amendment Bill) was published in the Gazette today (March 19), and will be introduced into the Legislative Council on March 24.

The Amendment Bill seeks to amend the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (APCO) (Cap. 311) for tightening three air quality objectives (AQOs) (namely the 24-hour AQO for sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and the annual and 24-hour AQOs of fine suspended particulates (FSP/PM_{2.5})) stipulated in Schedule 5 to the APCO, and provide a transitional arrangement for designated projects with Environmental Permits (EPs) granted under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (EIAO) (Cap. 499) before the commencement of the new AQOs.

The prevailing AQOs, which took effect on January 1, 2014, cover seven key air pollutants and 12 objectives. They are benchmarked against the interim targets (ITs) and ultimate levels of the World Health Organization's Air Quality Guidelines (WHO AQGs). Six of the AQOs have already adopted the ultimate targets of the WHO AQGs, while the remainder are at the ITs (see Annex). As required under the APCO, the Government must review the AQOs at least once every five years.

The Secretary for the Environment completed a review of the AQOs in the end of 2018. The review explored a wide range of ongoing and new air quality improvement measures, and analysed the past air quality data which showed that the overall air quality had improved progressively. It also assessed that, upon implementation of the measures, the air quality in 2025 would continue to improve and the AQOs could be tightened. Based on the assessment results, the review recommended tightening the 24-hour AQO for SO₂ and the annual and 24-hour AQOs for FSP/PM_{2.5} from the prevailing IT-1 level to the more stringent IT-2 level of the WHO AQGs (see Annex).

The Environment Bureau launched a three-month public consultation in mid-2019 on the review recommendations. Taking into account the various factors and the views gathered, the ENB reported to the Advisory Council on the Environment in early 2020 on the findings of the public consultation and the decision to tighten the AQOs.

A spokesman for the Environment Bureau said, "To preserve the integrity of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) system, when implementing the new AQOs, we will include a transitional arrangement for designated projects with EPs granted under the EIAO before the commencement of the new AQOs. For these projects, the prevailing AQOs which took effect on January 1, 2014, will apply to an application for a variation of an EP lodged within 36 months of the commencement of the new AQOs. A similar transitional arrangement was also provided in the last AQOs review."

The spokesperson added, "To demonstrate the Government's commitment to improving air quality, government projects for which EIA studies have not yet commenced should adopt the new AQOs as the benchmark for conducting air quality impact assessment under the EIA studies as far as practicable, and shall, on a best endeavours basis, reduce the number of allowable exceedances of the 24-hour AQO for FSP/PM2.5 to 18 days per calendar year, which is more stringent than the allowable exceedance of 35 days per calendar year as stipulated in the Amendment Bill."

The Government is embarking on the next AQOs review to explore the scope for tightening the AQOs. The review will be completed by 2023.

Fraudulent websites and phishing instant messages related to Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited on fraudulent websites and phishing instant messages, which has been reported to the HKMA. Hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#) for ease of reference by members of the public.

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information to the websites concerned or has conducted any financial transactions through the websites should contact the bank concerned using the contact information provided in the press release, and report to the Police or contact the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

Labour Department investigates fatal work accident in Yuen Long

The Labour Department (LD) is investigating a fatal work accident that happened in Yuen Long this morning (March 19) in which a man died.

The LD immediately deployed staff to the scene upon receiving a report of the accident, and is now conducting an investigation to look into its cause.