

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, March 18, 2021 is 101.2 (down 0.2 against yesterday's index).

CS commends legal professionals for providing pro bono legal services to community

The Administration Wing under the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office (CSO) announced the result of the 2018-20 Recognition Scheme for Provision of Pro Bono Legal Services today (March 18) to commend legal professionals and law firms for providing pro bono legal services to the community from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2020.

There are 129 legal professionals presented with a Special Award under the Individual Category for having provided pro bono legal services of not less than 50 hours within the recognition period. Moreover, 279 legal professionals were presented with an Individual Award for having provided pro bono legal services of not less than 30 hours within the recognition period.

Apart from the Individual Award, 17 law firms were commended with a Company Award. They demonstrated significant efforts in providing pro bono legal services, and their legal professionals have provided the required aggregate hours of pro bono legal services during the recognition period.

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, expressed his gratitude to the legal professionals and law firms winning the awards for their contribution to voluntary service, and encouraged more legal professionals to volunteer in pro bono services. The rule of law is a highly important core value of Hong Kong. The Government is committed to promoting pro bono legal services to enhance citizens' access to justice.

To serve this purpose, the Government has provided subvention for the Duty Lawyer Service to run the Free Legal Advice Scheme (FLAS) at nine District Offices of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) on weekday evenings to engage volunteer lawyers to provide free legal advice. There are 1 262 pro bono lawyers participating in the FLAS, handling over 5 600 cases in 2020.

Furthermore, the CSO has implemented the Legal Advice Scheme for Unrepresented Litigants on Civil Procedures (Procedural Advice Scheme). Resident lawyers and volunteer lawyers will provide free legal advice on

legal procedures. The Procedural Advice Scheme covers litigants who are parties to civil legal proceedings, including the start of proceedings, in the Lands Tribunal, Family Court, District Court or courts at levels above.

In addition to the abovementioned schemes and services, Free Legal Advice Service on Building Management run by the HAD in collaboration with the Law Society of Hong Kong, Bar Free Legal Service Scheme of the Hong Kong Bar Association and Free Legal Helpline run by the Law Society of Hong Kong, etc, also provide pro bono legal services recognised by the Scheme.

For more details of the Scheme and the list of awardees, please visit www.admwing.gov.hk/eng/public_service/probonolegalservices.html.

[Hong Kong resident employer and illegal worker jailed](#)

A Hong Kong resident employer and a Filipino illegal worker holding a recognisance form were jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (March 17).

During operation "Twilight" conducted on September 10, 2019, Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a restaurant in Mong Kok. An illegal worker was arrested while working as a dish-washing worker. Also, during an anti-illegal worker operation conducted on December 17, 2019, ImmD investigators raided a restaurant in Kwai Chung. Three illegal workers were arrested while working as dish-washing workers. The Hong Kong resident employer of the four illegal workers was also arrested.

The four illegal workers were jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts earlier. The Hong Kong resident employer was charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with four counts of being an employer of a person who was not lawfully employable. He pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to two months' imprisonment for each count with parts of the sentences to run consecutively, making a total of three months' imprisonment.

In addition, during operation "Twilight" conducted on March 15, ImmD investigators raided a restaurant in Tsuen Wan. One female Filipino illegal worker, aged 48, was arrested while working as a dish-washing worker. Upon identity checking, she produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant.

The illegal worker was charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with taking employment after landing in Hong Kong unlawfully and remaining in Hong Kong without the authority of the Director of Immigration or while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in

force. She pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening on vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers who are arrested during any operation, with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

[Import of poultry meat and products](#)

from areas in Poland suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (March 18) that in view of a notification from the General Veterinary Inspectorate of Poland about outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in GÅ,ubczycki District of Opolskie Region, Trzebnicki District of DolnoÅ>lÄ...ski Region, Kaliski District of Wielkopolskie Region, Kartuski District of Pomorskie Region and Ropczycko-SÄ™dziszowski District of Podkarpackie Region in Poland, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above-mentioned areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 13 500 tonnes of frozen poultry meat and about 39.08 million poultry eggs from Poland last year.

"The CFS has contacted the Polish authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the World Organisation for Animal Health and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

Online Hong Kong Flower Show 2021 to launch tomorrow (with photos)

The Online Hong Kong Flower Show 2021 (Online Flower Show), presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will be held from 10am tomorrow (March 19) to April 19 on the dedicated website (www.hkflowershow.hk), showcasing 20 garden plots of exquisite floral designs. The public can enjoy this new experience comfortably at home via the Online Flower Show website.

Returning with the overall theme "City of Flowers, City of Love", along with the rhododendron as theme flower, the Online Flower Show will feature an entertaining 3D virtual tour that guides members of the public on a 360-degree virtual journey of 20 Oriental-style and Western-style garden plots with thematic floral displays at designated parks in Hong Kong. The garden plots across 18 districts are of distinctive designs ranging from simple and elegant arrangements of Chinese pavilions, tranquil Japanese gardens and beautiful Thai decorations, to the colourful and delightful displays of Western-style gardens.

The theme flower display at Kowloon Park covers a variety of rhododendrons, together with an attractive and spectacular mosaiculture display comprising seven pieces of rhododendrons, each over 1.5 metres in height. The wonderful mosaic is made up of more than 7 000 mokara and dendrobium. The Tulip Display at the Central and Western District Promenade (Central Section) with 15 000 colourful flowers is popular among the public for photo-taking alongside the waterfront. The public can check out taking photos with these two thematic displays via the "LCSD Plusss" Instagram filter for selfies to enjoy a virtual on-site experience.

Other fun and fascinating content making up the Online Flower Show includes an interesting animation that introduces the legend of the rhododendron; rhododendron blossoms in the city; demonstrations on flower planting, flower appreciation and flower photography tips; and the showcase of previous flower shows and theme flowers. There are interactive games involving horticultural knowledge, and WhatsApp stickers for downloading and sharing the fun with family and friends. The public may also participate in an online voting activity through which the public can vote for their favourite Oriental Style Garden Plot and Western Style Garden Plot from the 18 districts for a chance to win prizes.

Moreover, the Hong Kong Science Museum (ScM) will present a special exhibition "Exploring Flowers with Five Senses" from tomorrow. Visitors can explore the wonderful world of flowers with interactive exhibits and their senses to look at the mysteries of the flower world. They can also touch plants with different textures, listen to their rhythm, learn the history of edible flower recipes and enjoy the artistry and perfumery of floral scents. Special opening hours from 10am to 5pm daily (except on regular closing days) will be implemented. The Museum will also apply admission by sessions and quotas to limit visitor flows. For details please visit the ScM's website (hk.science.museum).

In addition, displays of books on flowers and plants, and children's stories inspired by flowers and springtime will be specially set up in Hong Kong Central Library and City Hall Public Library. Readers can also discover more about flowers and plants through reading online from the website of Hong Kong Public Libraries. For the latest information, please visit the Online Flower Show's dedicated website.

Visitors to facilities of public libraries and museums will need to use hand sanitiser and will be subject to temperature checks before admission. They also need to wear their own masks. Children under 12 will only be allowed to enter the venues when accompanied by an adult. Enhanced measures including cleaning and disinfection between sessions will be conducted. Appeals are made to members of the public to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app and scan the QR code with the app before entering the LCSD venues. For a visitor who opts for registering personal information for entering, the venue staff may immediately call the contact number provided by the visitor on the spot to verify the authenticity of information. Visitors are reminded to arrive earlier to avoid delaying their visits as a longer time is required for such registration. To tie in with the Government's anti-epidemic efforts,

the aforesaid arrangements aim to enable necessary contact tracing if a confirmed case is found, thus minimising the risk of further transmission of the virus.

