

Results of Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards (Phase X) announced

The Department of Health (DH) today (December 22) published reference standards on safety and quality for 31 commonly used Chinese Materia Medica (CMM) in Phase X of the Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards (HKCMMS).

"The HKCMMS Project was launched in 2002. With the concerted efforts of our collaboration partners throughout the past years, the HKCMMS have become well-recognised reference standards in the field of Chinese medicine testing and certification, and have contributed to promoting the use of evidence-based, safe and quality Chinese medicines," a DH spokesman said.

"This volume is the tenth of the series setting out reference standards for CMM commonly used in Hong Kong. Up to now, the number of CMM with reference standards totals 330. Noting the latest development in instrumental technology for testing organochlorine pesticide (OCP) residues, we have added gas chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (GC-MS/MS) for the determination of OCP in this volume, promoting and enhancing the application of testing methods. In addition, we have published a third monograph on animal originated CMM, which has employed deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) fingerprinting technology for CMM authentication," the spokesman added.

The criteria for selection of CMM for the research include the following:

- * common usage in the local community;
- * international concern in respect of their safety and quality;
- * high economic value in the local market; and
- * priority being accorded to the CMM listed in the two schedules of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance.

Research work was conducted by research teams from six local universities, namely the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the City University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the University of Hong Kong as well as Taiwan's China Medical University.

An International Advisory Board comprising local, Mainland and overseas experts advised on the research principles, methodologies, parameters and analytical methods of the HKCMMS. The Government Laboratory developed analytical methods for determination of heavy metals, pesticide residues and mycotoxins, and participated in inter-laboratory verification. The National Medical Products Administration and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine also provided their valuable advice and support.

The HKCMMS Volume X sets out the names, sources and descriptions of the 31 CMM, as well as methods of identification (including microscopic

identification, thin-layer chromatographic identification and high-performance liquid chromatographic fingerprinting identification), tests and assays. The 31 CMM are Ardisiae Japonicae Herba, Artemisiae Anomalae Herba, Catharanthi Rosei Herba, Commelinae Herba, Crotonis Fructus (unprocessed), Deinagkistrodon (Agkistrodon), Dendrobii Caulis, Dioscoreae Bulbiferae Rhizoma, Eupatorii Chinensis Radix et Rhizoma, Euphorbiae Hirtae Herba, Euphorbiae Pekinensis Radix, Fici Pumilae Receptaculum, Geranii Caroliniani Herba, Hyperici Ascyri Herba, Impatientis Caulis, Isodonis Herba, Leonuri Fructus, Nigellae Semen, Osmundae Rhizoma, Phyllanthi Urinariae Herba, Picrasmae Ramulus et Folium, Polygonati Rhizoma, Ranunculi Ternati Radix, Rhododendri Daurici Folium, Salviae Plebeiae Herba, Sambuci Williamsii Ramulus, Sargentodoxae Caulis, Saxifragae Herba, Sedi Herba, Tamaricis Cacumen and Valerianae Radix et Rhizoma.

The DH will arrange online briefing sessions for the Chinese medicines trade as well as representatives of laboratories to update them on the latest research development of the HKCMMS Project.

The HKCMMS Volume X is now available for public access at www.cmro.gov.hk/html/eng/GCMTI/hkcmms/volumes.html. For enquiries, please contact the DH at 2319 8562.

Police accept PCPD's investigation report

Police accept the investigation report of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD) issued today (December 22) on an incident happened in Tai Po Mega Mall on December 26 last year and will follow up the four recommendations proposed in the report.

Police all along attach great importance to privacy for personal data and are committed to complying with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. Police also demand officers to always abide by the requirements of the Ordinance.

Regarding information security and protection of personal data, Police have clear and stringent guidelines and procedures regulating the handling and use of personal data by officers while performing duties.

Police agree that there was shortcoming for the officer concerned to display the identity card of the relevant reporter during the incident. Police have rebuked the involved officer and will conduct disciplinary review with reference to the contents of the investigation report.

A Police spokesman said, "Police accept the views presented in the investigation report and will follow up the four proposed recommendations.

Police will review relevant policies and guidelines as well as enhance training for officers in order to ensure that officers of different ranks understand and abide by the Ordinance and the relevant data protection principles. Police will continue to adopt all practical measures to protect personal data privacy.”

Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Korea, UK and Vietnam suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 22) that in view of a notification from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of Korea about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N8 avian influenza in Hwaseong-si of Gyeonggi-do Province and Gochang-gun of Jeollabuk-do Province in Korea, and notifications from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Richmondshire District of North Yorkshire County in the United Kingdom (UK), and an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N6 avian influenza in Khanh Hoa Province in Vietnam respectively, 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 Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with Vietnam for the import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. According to the Census and Statistics Department, in the first nine months of this year, Hong Kong imported about 740 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat and about 8.9 million poultry eggs from Korea; about 8,700 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat and about 330,000 poultry eggs from the UK; and about 3.25 million poultry eggs from Vietnam.

"The CFS has contacted the Korean, UK and Vietnamese authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE 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.

Hongkong Post holiday arrangements for New Year 2021

Hongkong Post announced today (December 22) that no mail delivery and no mail collection will be provided on the coming public holiday on January 1 (Friday). All post offices will be closed. In accordance with the usual practice, mail posted on the public holidays will be processed on the next working day.

For more information, members of the public may visit Hongkong Post's website at www.hongkongpost.hk or call the Hongkong Post enquiry hotline at 2921 2222.

Hong Kong's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statistics for third quarter of 2020

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (December 22) the preliminary Balance of Payments (BoP) and International Investment Position (IIP) statistics of Hong Kong for the third quarter of 2020. This release also included the preliminary External Debt (ED) statistics of Hong Kong for the same period.

I. Balance of Payments

Hong Kong recorded a BoP surplus of \$19.3 billion (as a ratio of 2.8% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2020, as against a deficit of \$15.5 billion (as a ratio of 2.4% to GDP) in the second quarter of 2020. Reserve assets correspondingly increased by the same amount (\$19.3 billion) in the third quarter of 2020.

Current account

The current account recorded a surplus of \$96.5 billion (as a ratio of 13.8% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2020. This implies that Hong Kong saves more than invests, enabling Hong Kong to accumulate external financial assets (such as equity securities or debt securities) as a buffer against global financial volatilities. Compared with the current account surplus of \$69.3 billion (as a ratio of 9.6% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2019, the increase in surplus was mainly due to an increase in the goods surplus and an increase in the net inflow of primary income, partly offset by a decrease in the services surplus.

The goods surplus increased to \$31.5 billion in the third quarter of 2020, compared with the \$0.2 billion in the same quarter of 2019. Over the same period, the services surplus decreased to \$25.4 billion in the third quarter of 2020, compared with the \$35.7 billion in the same quarter of 2019. The primary income inflow and outflow amounted to \$401.7 billion and \$357.0 billion respectively, thus yielding a net inflow of \$44.8 billion in the third quarter of 2020, compared with a net inflow of \$38.8 billion in the same quarter of 2019.

Financial account

An overall net outflow of financial non-reserve assets amounting to \$108.0 billion (as a ratio of 15.5% to GDP) was recorded in the third quarter of 2020, compared with an overall net outflow of \$104.2 billion (as a ratio of 16.4% to GDP) in the second quarter of 2020. The overall net outflow recorded in the third quarter of 2020 was the result of a net outflow of other investment, partly offset by a net inflow of direct investment, a net inflow of portfolio investment and a net inflow due to the cash settlement of financial derivatives.

In the third quarter of 2020, reserve assets increased by \$19.3 billion, as against a decrease of \$15.5 billion in the second quarter of 2020.

II. International Investment Position

At the end of the third quarter of 2020, both Hong Kong's external financial assets and liabilities stood at a very high level, amounting to \$45,937.4 billion (equivalent to 16.8 times of GDP) and \$30,883.2 billion (equivalent to 11.3 times of GDP) respectively, a typical feature of a prominent international financial centre.

After netting out the external financial liabilities from the external financial assets, Hong Kong's net external financial assets amounted to \$15,054.2 billion (equivalent to 5.5 times of GDP) at the end of the third quarter of 2020, compared with \$13,450.9 billion (equivalent to 4.9 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2020. Hong Kong's net external financial assets to GDP ratio is one of the largest in the world, which provides the economy with a strong cushion against sudden external shocks.

III. External Debt

At the end of the third quarter of 2020, Hong Kong's gross ED amounted to \$13,317.7 billion (equivalent to 4.9 times of GDP). Compared with \$12,995.0 billion (equivalent to 4.7 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2020, gross ED increased by \$322.7 billion. This was mainly attributable to the increases in ED of the banking sector, debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending) and ED of other sectors.

As one of the world's major financial centres, Hong Kong has a significant amount of ED held against the local banking sector arising through normal banking businesses. At the end of the third quarter of 2020, 60.4% of Hong Kong's ED was attributable to the banking sector. Other ED

mainly consisted of ED of other sectors (24.2%) and debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending) (15.2%).

Further information

BoP is a statistical statement that systematically summarises, for a specific time period (typically a year or a quarter), the economic transactions of an economy with the rest of the world (i.e. between residents and non-residents).

IIP is a balance sheet showing the stock of external financial assets and liabilities of an economy at a particular time point. The difference between the external financial assets and liabilities is the net IIP of the economy, which represents either its net claim on or net liability to the rest of the world.

Gross ED, at a particular time point, is the outstanding amount of those actual current, and not contingent, liabilities that are owed to non-residents by residents of an economy and that require payment of principals and/or interests by the debtors at some time points in the future.

Table 1 presents Hong Kong's BoP. Table 2 presents the detailed current account, while Table 3 presents the detailed capital and financial account. Table 4 shows Hong Kong's IIP, and Table 5 shows Hong Kong's ED.

With the incorporation of the latest data from surveys and other sources, the statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for 2019 have been revised. As regards the statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for the third quarter of 2020, they are only preliminary figures and are subject to revision upon the availability of more data.

More details of the statistics of BoP (including seasonally adjusted current account), IIP and ED, together with the conceptual and methodological details, are presented in the publication Balance of Payments, International Investment Position and External Debt Statistics of Hong Kong, Third Quarter 2020 published by the C&SD. Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp260.jsp?productCode=B1040001).

For enquiries about the BoP, IIP and ED statistics, please contact the Balance of Payments Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 6979; fax: 2116 0278; email: bop@censtatd.gov.hk).