

HK reopens borders with mainland

HONG Kong cancelled its stringent COVID-19 rules from yesterday, meaning that arrivals no longer need to do mandatory polymerase chain reaction tests while the city's vaccine pass would also be scrapped.

All measures would be cancelled, apart from the wearing of masks which still remains compulsory, city leader John Lee told a media briefing on Wednesday.

"The city has reached a relatively high vaccination rate which builds an anti-epidemic barrier.

"Hong Kong has a sufficient amount of medicine to fight COVID, and healthcare workers have gained rich experience in facing the pandemic," he added.

Lee said his government is aiming to reopen the borders with the mainland by January 15 and was working with authorities over the border to ensure an orderly reopening.

He said the authorities have been preparing for the scrapping of all restrictions. "The time is appropriate for us to do this, having prepared for six months. The whole society is preparing for this. We are doing this according to our local epidemic situation."

Hong Kong's vaccine pass requirement, which was imposed in February and was a must for



Passengers go through immigration at the international airport in Hong Kong on Wednesday. — AFP

people to access most venues, ended from Thursday. Social distancing rules such as a cap on gatherings of more than 12 people in public are also scrapped.

The city has for nearly three years largely followed Chinese mainland's lead in tackling the novel coronavirus, with both places being the last strongholds in adopting a zero-COVID policy. The removal

of the curbs is likely to result in an increase of travelers.

Chinese mainland will stop requiring inbound travellers to go into quarantine from January 8.

Restrictions on travel between Hong Kong and the mainland were imposed in early 2020. The reopening was postponed several times due to outbreaks in Hong Kong or the mainland.

International passengers arriving in Hong Kong since mid-month are no longer subject to COVID-related movement controls, the government said in December.

Business groups, and diplomats had slammed the virus rules, saying they threatened Hong Kong's competitiveness and standing as an international financial center.

(Reuters)

Citizens' applications for passports to resume

Zhu Qing

FOLLOWING the downgrading of COVID-19 into Category B in China, the policies and measures of the immigration administration will be optimized from January 8 to promote international exchanges, the National Immigration Administration said on Tuesday.

Chinese citizens' applications for ordinary passports for tourism purposes as well as for visiting friends and relatives abroad and for mainland residents to visit Hong Kong will be resumed, according to the announcement.

Meanwhile, foreigners' applications for the extension, renewal and re-issuance of ordinary visas, the issuance, renewal and re-issuance of residence permits will also be resumed, including urgent services, the NIA said.

Additionally, the issuance of port visas and temporary entry permits, and the implementation of the 24-hour, 72-hour and 144-hour visa-free transit policy will recommence, as will the issuance of exit-entry permits in China and border control areas, it added.