

Speech by Mr CM Shun, Director of the Hong Kong Observatory 20 March 2012

Before reporting on the latest developments in the Hong Kong Observatory, let me first introduce my Assistant Directors. They are:

1. Dr CM Cheng, responsible for public weather services
2. Miss SY Lau, responsible for aviation weather services
3. Mr HY Mok, acting Assistant Director, responsible for climate and geophysical matters
4. Mr Edwin Lai, responsible for radiation monitoring and instruments

To begin with, I have the pleasure to report that the Observatory won 16 international and local awards in the past year covering service enhancement, information and communication technology, and community engagement. These include the Civil Service Enhancement Gold Award for Small Department, and the UK Royal Meteorological Society Award. They represent wide recognition of the achievements of the Observatory.

In weather forecasting service, we have achieved quite good results. In the latest survey conducted in October 2011 by an independent market survey company, members of the public gave higher marks on our forecasts relative to the past several years. About 80% of the weather forecasts were considered accurate by the public, the highest since 2006. These results are in line with 2011 receiving the highest mark since 1995 in objective verification of our weather forecasts. Of course, last year saw less rain and so weather forecasting might have been less challenging.

Besides the day-to-day weather forecasts, we have also made progress in seasonal forecasts. Just take the past winter as an example. I think you can still recall that we predicted a colder than normal winter and indeed experienced a rather cold Christmas and a very cold Lunar New Year. In fact, the mean temperature in winter, i.e. December 2011 – February 2012, turned out to be 15.9 degrees, 1.1 degrees below the normal of 17.0 degrees – the lowest since the winter of 1985/86.

On service delivery, we have also taken great strides, in particular, in enhancing the delivery of services over the internet, mobile platforms and social network platforms.

A new record in access rate of the Observatory's website was set in 2011, registering a total of 6.2 billion, about 3.4 times that of 2010. "MyObservatory", which provides

easy access of weather information specific to the user's location through mobile devices anytime and anywhere, continues to gain popularity. Its page view figure soared to 1.9 billion in 2011, exceeding the figure for the entire Observatory's website in 2010 (Appendix 1). Since its launch in March 2010, there are already 1.4 million downloads of the "MyObservatory" application.

Apart from "MyObservatory", we have also developed and launched the mobile application "MyWorldWeather" (Appendix 2) on the iPhone platform on behalf of the World Meteorological Organization. It is the world's first service for people on the move, automatically providing official weather services of the city nearest to the user, from over 1,500 cities worldwide.

Last year, we also broke new ground by disseminating quick earthquake messages (Appendix 3) through Twitter and Weibo for the public whenever a strong earthquake of magnitude 6 or above occurred anywhere on earth. Up to now, more than 200 quick earthquake messages have been delivered in around 10 minutes after the event.

Regarding partnership with our counterparts, last year we collaborated with the Government Flying Service (GFS) to use its fixed-wing aircraft for collecting meteorological data for the first time over the South China Sea. In June 2011, the fixed-wing aircraft flew near the centre of the Tropical Storm Haima, collecting unique data helpful in determining the strength of the storm and in numerical weather prediction of tropical cyclone (Appendix 4). The Observatory will continue to collaborate with GFS to collect more meteorological data using aircraft over the South China Sea, in order to fill in the data void in this region.

Looking ahead, we continue to move in the direction of providing weather forecast of higher resolution. From now on, we will adopt two weather icons, instead of just one icon, when a change in weather is expected in our local weather forecasts (Appendix 5). This feature is now available in our Internet website and iPhone version of "MyObservatory", and will be extended to Android version of "MyObservatory" soon. We will explore the feasibility of adopting similar approach in providing more detailed forecast for the first few days of the 7-day forecast.

Many people, particularly those engaging in outdoor activities, are concerned whether rain will come in and affect their activities. In view of this, we are developing a new product for "MyObservatory" featuring location-specific rainfall forecast in the next couple of hours. This new rainfall forecast will alert a user when rain is about to affect the area where the user is located. The new mobile service is expected to be

available in the next few months.

To better alert users of impending inclement weather, we also start providing “special weather tips” on the front page of our website whenever significant change in weather such as approach of heavy rain or potential change of Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is expected (Appendix 5). “Special weather tips” are also available on the iPhone version of “MyObservatory” and will be extended to the Android version very soon.

Many people are using iPad in addition to smart phone to connect to “MyObservatory”. To take advantage of the bigger screen of iPad, we have developed a higher resolution version of “MyObservatory” (Appendix 6), which is available for download now. Apart from supporting the display of higher resolution weather photos, this iPad version also comes with pamphlets on the Observatory’s services.

While we spend efforts to enhance our weather forecast, information content and delivery channels, we also need to increase our engagement with users to make sure that our services will be user-friendly, meeting the intended use by the public and various sectors. Building on our productive interaction with the aviation, shipping, fisherman, elderly and education communities, we will further extend our engagement to other sectors of society progressively, especially weather-sensitive sectors, so that tailored information could be delivered to target users. We expect that this will be a two way process, i.e., the Observatory will do more to reach out to the community, and at the same time, we welcome feedback and suggestions from the public, specialized users and the like.

One of our very successful community outreach projects in recent years is the Community Weather Information Network (Co-WIN), which was jointly set up with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2007 to raise the awareness of students and the community about weather and climate. The Co-WIN project has entered its fourth year now with over 100 members. As a new initiative of the Co-WIN, the Community Weather Observing Scheme (CWOS) will be officially launched later this year. CWOS is a new web platform for sharing weather photos and reports posted by students and other contributing members. The aim of CWOS is to encourage community learning and participation in making weather observations. Through CWOS, it is hoped that the general public will become more aware of weather hazards and the changing climate.

To further promote learning about the weather, we are developing interesting educational material on cloud types and special weather phenomena for the public especially students and kids. One new product is the “Changeable Clouds” series of jigsaw bookmarks in my hands.

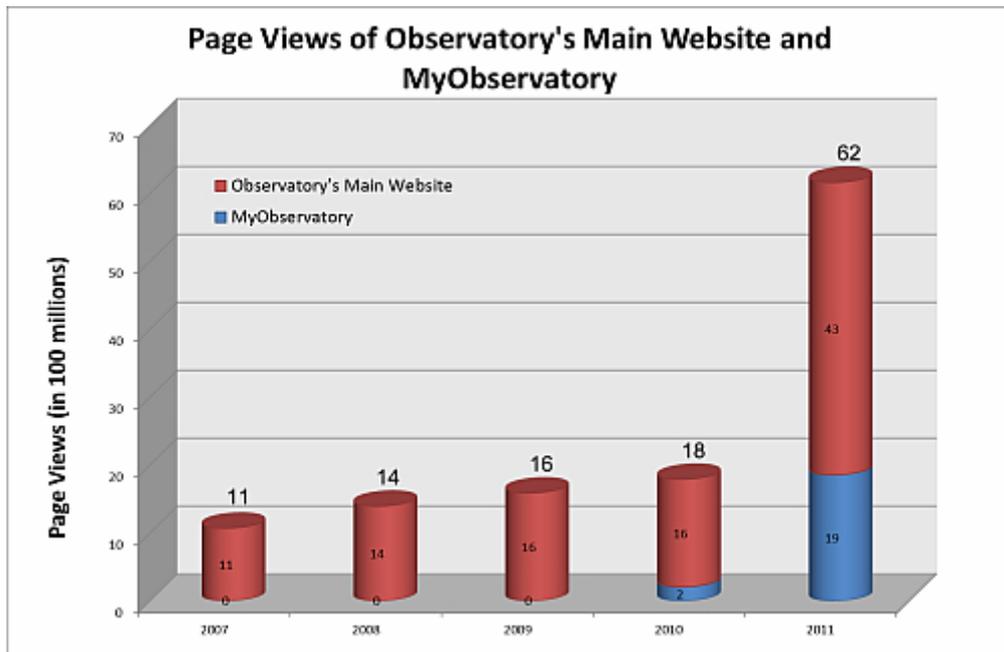
As for the annual weather outlook this year which I understand is of much interest to the public, let me first say a few words about the current La Nina event. The latest forecasts by a number of climate models around the world indicate that it will weaken and end in the coming months. Past records show that with La Nina persisting in the spring, the typhoon season in Hong Kong will likely start in June or earlier. Integrating and analyzing all the available information, we expect 5 to 8 tropical cyclones to come within 500 km of Hong Kong, which may affect Hong Kong, against the long-term average of 6. As regards rainfall, we expect normal to below-normal rainfall this year. We will closely monitor the weather situation during the course of the year, and conduct a further assessment around mid-year.

As the rainy season approaches, I would also like to remind the public about the possible impact brought by thunderstorms. Apart from lightning, heavy rain and flooding, strong wind gusts could also be brought by thunderstorms. Every couple of years, we saw short-term strong winds brought by thunderstorms (called “Shi Hu Feng” by local community) blowing down scaffoldings, toppling containers and damaging properties. We have updated the pamphlet on thunderstorm to promote better preparedness by the public, logistic community, container terminal operators and the like.

Finally, I would like to request your help in publicizing the Observatory’s Open Day this Saturday and Sunday, that is, 24 and 25 March, when the Observatory ground and exhibits will be opened to the public to celebrate the World Meteorological Day. The public will also have a chance to visit our newly refurbished Exhibition Hall. All are welcome. Right before the start of the Open Day on 24 March, there will also be an award presentation to winners of a Hong Kong Meteorological Society primary school painting competition titled “My typhoon days”. Here are the winning paintings, which are very creative and informative!

Let me stop here. If you have questions, my Assistant Directors and I will try our best to answer them. Thank you!

Appendix 1



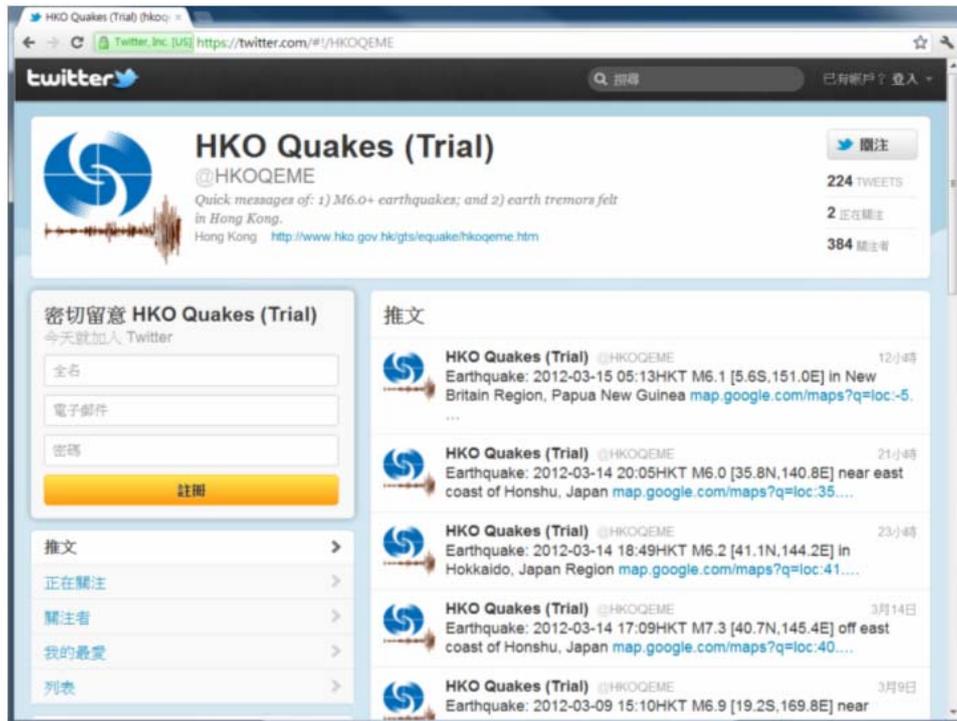
Visit figures of the Observatory's main website and "MyObservatory"

Appendix 2



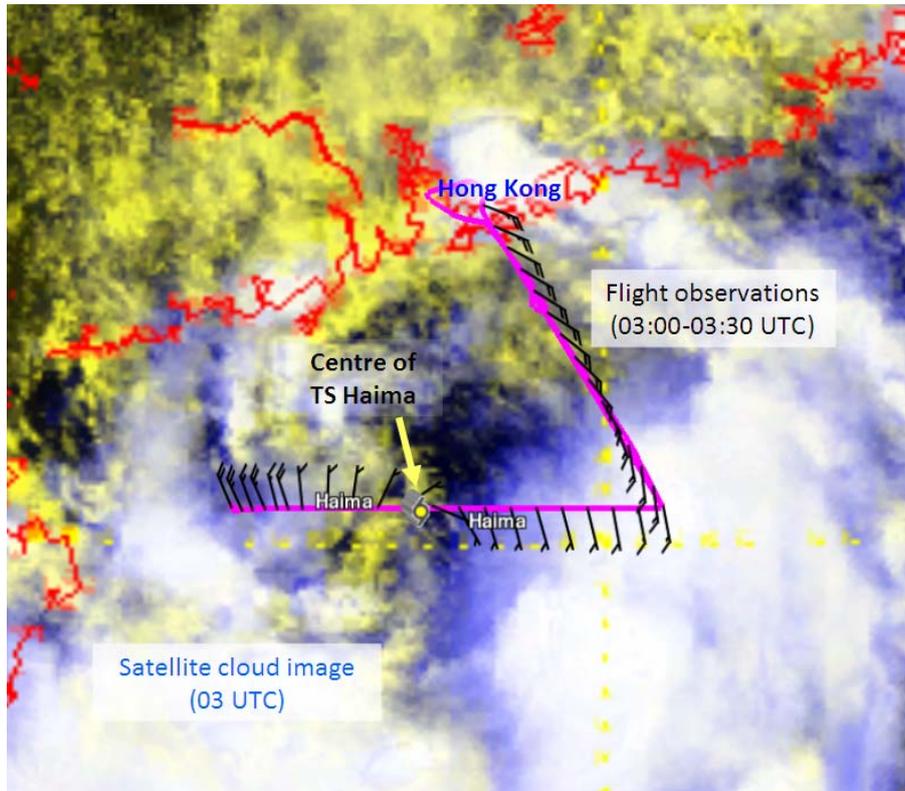
Sample screen of “MyWorldWeather”

Appendix 3



Sample screen of quick earthquake message

Appendix 4



Wind observations from GFS flight (wind barbs in black) overlaid with satellite cloud image for TS Haima (22 June 2011)

Appendix 5

The screenshot displays the Hong Kong Observatory website interface. At the top, the logo and name 'Hong Kong Observatory' are visible, along with the text 'The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region'. A navigation bar includes 'GOVHK 香港政府一站通', 'TEXT ONLY 繁體版 简体版', a search box, and 'SITE MAP'. A left sidebar contains a list of menu items such as 'Home', 'What's new', 'About us', 'HKO Side Lights', 'Our Services', 'Visitors Figures', 'Press releases', 'Today's Weather Warnings', 'Local Weather Observations', 'Weather Forecast', 'Weather Monitoring Imagery', 'Computer Forecast Products', 'MyObservatory', 'Tropical Cyclones', 'Aviation Weather Services', 'Marine Meteorological Services', 'Weather Information for Sports', 'Weather Information for Communities', 'China Weather', 'World Weather', 'Climatological Information Services', 'Climate Forecast', 'Climate Change', 'El Nino and La Nina', 'Earthquakes and Tsunamis', 'Astronomy, Space Weather and Geomagnetism', 'Time and Calendar', 'Radiation Monitoring, Assessment and Protection', 'Educational Resources', 'Publications', 'Media and Information Services', and 'Audio/Video Webpage'. The main content area features a 'Special Weather Tips' alert box with a red header and a yellow background, stating: 'Widespread heavy rain may affect Hong Kong in a few hours. Members of the public should be on the alert. (28-03-2012 09:45)'. Below the alert is a weather map showing temperature and rainfall data across the region. To the right of the map, there is a 'Current Weather at 9 a.m.' section with details for HKO (Temp 17 °C, RH 76 %) and King's Park (UV Index 3 (moderate)). Further down, there is a 'Local Weather Forecast' section with a blue header and a lightning bolt icon, containing text about a cold front and a forecast for today and the outlook.

Hong Kong Observatory
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

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28 Mar 2012 Wed Gregorian/Lunar Calendar

Special Weather Tips
Widespread heavy rain may affect Hong Kong in a few hours. Members of the public should be on the alert. (28-03-2012 09:45)

Weather map Rainfall map Airport weather Earthquake/Tsunami Tropical Cyclone Other

Temp RH Max Temp Min Temp Wind Visibility RF

Current Weather at 9 a.m.
HKO : Temp 17 °C RH 76 %
King's Park : UV Index 3 (moderate)
North Point Sea Surface Temp : 17 °C

Astro Tide Satellite Radar Lightning
Sun ☀ 06:04
Sun ☿ 18:48
Moon 🌙 09:41
Moon 🌑 21:17
Moon Phase

Local Weather Forecast Updated at 09:45 HKI

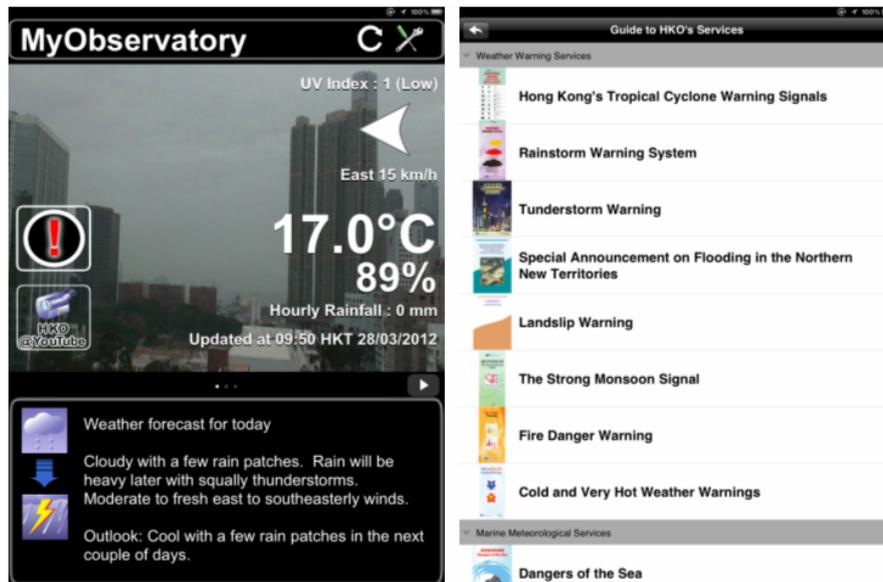
A cold front has formed over the northern part of southern China and is moving southwards gradually. The associated rain and thunderstorms are expected to affect the coastal areas of Guangdong later.

Weather forecast for today
Cloudy with a few rain patches. Rain will be heavy later with squally thunderstorms. Moderate to fresh east to southeasterly winds.

Outlook : Cool with a few rain patches in the next couple of days.

Sample display of two weather icons and “special weather tips” on the front page of HKO website

Appendix 6



Sample screen of iPad version of “MyObservatory”