

Public views sought on Sports Subvention Scheme review

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is now conducting a comprehensive review of the Sports Subvention Scheme (SSS), with a view to optimising the scheme and further enhancing the development of sport in Hong Kong. Members of the public are welcome to express their views until February 28.

The SSS review includes: (a) funding principles and eligibility for national sports associations (NSAs) and other sports organisations (SOs); (b) allocation of subvention and subsidy level; (c) means to attract and retain talents to stay and continue to contribute to the sporting arena; and (d) measures to enhance monitoring and corporate governance.

Members of the public are welcome to express their views during the consultation period by email (reviewsss@lcsd.gov.hk), by fax (2681 2099) or by post to Sports Funding Office of the LCSD at 2/F, LCS Headquarters, 1-3 Pai Tau Street, Sha Tin (please quote Comprehensive Review of Sports Subvention Scheme on the envelope).

The LCSD is also gauging views from all subvented NSAs/SOs, and has commissioned a consultant to study matters including the principles, modes and mechanisms of subvention to sports organisations in overseas countries. It is expected that the review will be completed by 2019-20. More details are available on the LCSD website www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/programmes/programmeslist/sss/review.html.

Postal services to Uruguay return to normal

Hongkong Post announced today (January 28) that, as advised by the postal administration of Uruguay, postal services to Uruguay have returned to normal.

Provision of alternative electronic payment system in Hong Kong Island Green Minibus Route Nos. 8 and 8X starts

The Transport Department (TD) today (January 28) announced that the electronic payment "Easy Go" System has been put into service in Hong Kong Island Green Minibus (GMB) Route Nos. 8 and 8X (Baguio Villas (Lower) – Central (Exchange Square)) for a trial of operation starting today.

A spokesman for the TD said, "With the advent of new technologies, different electronic payment systems have become increasingly common and diversified in Hong Kong. In connection with the Government's policy initiative of smart city development, we welcome the introduction of new technology in the GMB sector to facilitate fare collection, and provide passengers with an alternative electronic means of fare payment."

The GMB operator has displayed passenger notices at the GMB terminus and inside compartments in order to inform passengers of the service arrangement.

The spokesman added, "The TD will ensure that the new electronic payment system to be introduced by GMB operators for fare collection purposes should be reliable, user-friendly and efficient, in order to avoid causing disruption to the operation of the GMB services or the road traffic conditions, and to protect the interests of passengers and road users."

The TD will closely monitor the operation of the electronic payment system. The TD will further liaise with the GMB operators on the feasibility to extend the electronic payment system to other GMB routes if the trial is proven to be feasible and desirable after review.

Passengers can call the operator's hotline at 2873 6808 should they have any enquires on the electronic payment system.

External Merchandise Trade Statistics for December 2018

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (January 28) the external merchandise trade statistics for December 2018. In December 2018, the values of Hong Kong's total exports and imports of goods both recorded year-on-year decreases, at 5.8% and 7.0% respectively.

In December 2018, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 5.8% over a year earlier to \$339.9 billion, after a year-on-year decrease of 0.8% in November 2018. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 7.0% over a year earlier to \$391.2 billion in December 2018, after a year-on-year increase of 0.5% in November 2018. A visible trade deficit of \$51.2 billion, equivalent to 13.1% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in December 2018.

For 2018 as a whole, the value of total exports of goods rose by 7.3% over 2017. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods increased by 8.4%. A visible trade deficit of \$563.3 billion, equivalent to 11.9% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in 2018.

Comparing the fourth quarter of 2018 with the preceding quarter on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 3.2%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 5.1%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing December 2018 with December 2017, total exports to Asia as a whole dropped by 7.8%. In this region, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations, in particular India (-35.9%), Vietnam (-15.7%), the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-8.7%), Korea (-4.5%) and Japan (-3.6%). On the other hand, increases were recorded in the values of total exports to Singapore (+29.9%) and Thailand (+9.9%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular Germany (-10.9%), the United Kingdom (-3.6%) and the USA (-0.7%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular Taiwan (-29.6%), Korea (-25.4%), India (-24.3%), the Philippines (-19.2%), Japan (-12.7%), Thailand (-8.0%) and the Mainland (-4.2%). Concurrently, an increase was recorded in the value of imports from Malaysia (+14.3%).

For 2018 as a whole, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular Singapore (+13.3%), Thailand (+11.9%), the Netherlands (+11.5%), the Mainland (+8.6%), the USA (+8.1%) and Vietnam (+4.5%). However, a year-on-year decrease was registered in the value of total exports to India (-15.3%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of imports from most major suppliers, in particular Malaysia (+64.6%), Korea (+10.4%), Singapore (+9.0%), the USA (+8.1%), the Mainland (+7.7%) and Thailand (+2.8%). On the other hand, a year-on-year decrease was registered in the value of imports from India (-14.0%).

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing December 2018 with December 2017, decreases were registered in the values of total exports of some principal commodity divisions, in particular "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$8.7 billion or -41.0%),

"electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$7.3 billion or -5.7%) and "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$2.2 billion or -5.3%). However, an increase was registered in the value of total exports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$2.0 billion or 48.5%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports of some principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$20.2 billion or -13.0%), "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$8.2 billion or -11.3%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$2.2 billion or -13.0%). However, an increase was registered in the value of imports of "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$3.2 billion or 9.0%).

For 2018 as a whole, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of total exports of some principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$198.0 billion or 14.3%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$44.2 billion or 10.9%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$28.1 billion or 13.6%). However, a year-on-year decrease was registered in the value of total exports of "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$28.3 billion or -14.0%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$179.7 billion or 11.4%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$68.6 billion or 19.4%) and "petroleum, petroleum products and related materials" (by \$24.4 billion or 33.0%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman noted that the value of merchandise exports showed an enlarged year-on-year decline in December 2018, as the moderation in global economic growth and the US-Mainland trade tensions increasingly weighed on the exports of many Asian economies. Nonetheless, thanks to the strong performance in the earlier part of the year, the value of merchandise exports rose notably by 7.3% for 2018 as a whole.

The near-term outlook for merchandise trade is challenging amid moderating global economic growth and the uncertainty surrounding the US-Mainland trade relations. The Government will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Further information

Table 1 at the annex presents the analysis of external merchandise trade statistics for December 2018. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2015 to December 2018, and Table 3 gives the seasonally adjusted series for the same period.

The values of total exports of goods to 10 main destinations for December 2018 are shown in Table 4, whereas the values of imports of goods from 10 main suppliers are given in Table 5.

Tables 6 and 7 show the values of total exports and imports of 10 principal commodity divisions for December 2018.

All the merchandise trade statistics described here are measured at current prices and no account has been taken of changes in prices between the periods of comparison. A separate analysis of the volume and price movements of external merchandise trade for December 2018 will be released in mid-February 2019.

The December 2018 issue of "Hong Kong External Merchandise Trade" contains detailed analysis on the performance of Hong Kong's external merchandise trade in December 2018 and will be available in mid-February 2019. Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp).

Enquiries on merchandise trade statistics may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (2) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 5042).

First licence application granted by Private Columbaria Licensing Board

The Private Columbaria Licensing Board earlier held an open meeting to consider a licence application submitted under the Private Columbaria Ordinance. The relevant procedures have been completed. The Licensing Board informed the applicant concerned in writing today (January 28) that its application had been granted.

The relevant licence will be issued on the same day the applicant concerned duly pays the prescribed licence fee in accordance with Schedule 6 of the Ordinance. The validity period of the licence takes effect from the date of issue of the licence. Upon the issue of the licence, information relating to the licence, including the name and address of the columbarium, restriction on sale of niche interment right (if any), approved plans and licence conditions, will be included in the Register of Private Columbaria to be kept by the Licensing Board in accordance with the Ordinance. The Register will be uploaded to the dedicated website on the regulation of private columbaria (www.rpc.gov.hk) after the issue of the licence mentioned above.

The Licensing Board will continue to process applications for specified instruments (i.e. licence, exemption or temporary suspension of liability under the Ordinance) submitted by some 140 private columbaria. Each applicant for a specified instrument should prove that the private columbarium

concerned complies with all the applicable requirements stipulated under the Ordinance and the requirements specified by the Licensing Board. In respect of applications for a licence, the applicant has to submit all the necessary documents and information to prove that the columbarium complies with requirements, including those relating to land, planning, buildings, fire safety, management plan and right to use the premises.

Each application for a specified instrument will be considered by the Licensing Board at its open meetings in due course. The Licensing Board will give regard to the public interest and other relevant considerations when determining an application.

Members of the public may visit the dedicated website mentioned above for information on the latest position of processing of individual applications for specified instruments, agendas of open meetings, decisions of the Licensing Board and the updated Register of Private Columbaria.

As the Ordinance has come into effect, a private columbarium must obtain a licence before it may sell or newly let out niches. To protect their interest, members of the public should buy directly from a licence holder and ensure that all the amounts required to be paid have been clearly stated in the sale agreement.