

Relief fund for farmers affected by heavy rainstorms

Local farmers who suffered serious losses caused by the heavy rainstorms can register with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) from tomorrow (August 31) to September 10 for assistance from an emergency relief fund.

An AFCD spokesman said today (August 30) that an appropriate amount of the relief fund would be released to affected farming households according to established criteria.

The department's preliminary investigation has revealed that about 300 hectares of farmland in the New Territories were affected by the rainstorms.

"After each typhoon or natural disaster, our staff will inspect farmland areas in the New Territories to assess the resultant damage," the spokesman said.

"Depending on the gravity of the damage, we may launch an operation to provide some relief to affected farmers."

Applicants for the fund should register at the office of the AFCD's Agricultural Extension Section at 5/F, Yuen Long Government Offices, 2 Kiu Lok Square, Yuen Long, or call 2476 2424 for enquiries.

SHA attends China-Japan-South Korea Cultural Ministers' Meeting in Harbin (with photos)

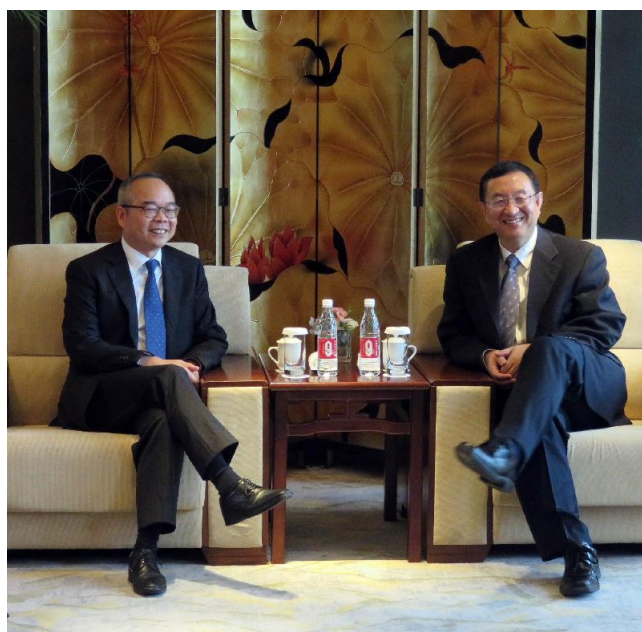
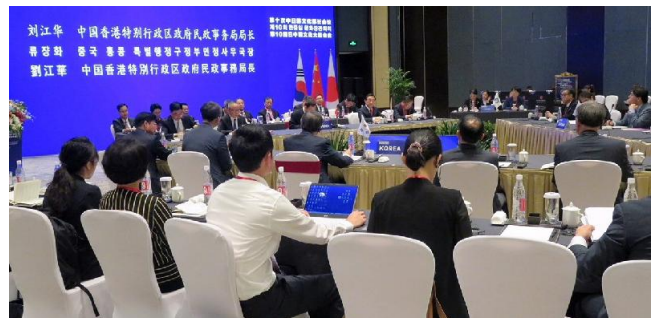
The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, today (August 30) attended the China-Japan-South Korea Cultural Ministers' Meeting in Harbin as a member of the Chinese delegation and delivered a speech introducing the latest and major cultural developments of Hong Kong.

In his speech, Mr Lau said one of the prominent cultural events to be held next year will be the biennial Asia Cultural Co-operation Forum. He thanked China, Japan and South Korea for their past support and participation and invited cultural ministers and delegates of China, Japan and South Korea, as well as delegates of Culture Cities of East Asia and European Capitals of Culture in 2019, to attend the Forum in Hong Kong next year.

In addition, Mr Lau said the Home Affairs Bureau has signed 26 agreements on cultural co-operation to enhance collaboration and exchange with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as well as provincial and municipal governments and departments. Last year, the "In Touch with Palace Museum" campaign was held in Hong Kong, while a thematic exhibition on Dunhuang culture is being held this year. In the coming year, the "Genesis and Spirit" series will be launched and a Hong Kong Week will be held in Shanghai, he added.

Looking ahead, Mr Lau said the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District will open by the end of this year, while the Hong Kong Palace Museum and M+ will be completed in the coming years. The Hong Kong Museum of Art will open next year after renovation and expansion. Arts and cultural development will become more prosperous in Hong Kong, he said.

This evening, Mr Lau will attend a joint concert presented by China, Japan and South Korea. Tomorrow morning (August 31) he will take part in a research and study programme on culture and tourism held as part of the Meeting. Mr Lau will return to Hong Kong from Harbin via Shenzhen in the afternoon.



Special traffic and transport arrangements for 2018-19 horse race meetings in Happy Valley

The Transport Department (TD) today (August 30) reminded the public that special traffic and transport arrangements will be implemented in Happy Valley during horse race meetings for 2018-19 from next Wednesday (September 5).

The special traffic and transport arrangements will mainly include:

- * From about 1.5 hours before the start of the first race, the section of Wong Nai Chung Road southbound between Queen's Road East and the up ramp outside the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) will be closed (except for vehicles heading for the Aberdeen Tunnel). The section of Wong Nai Chung Road southbound between Village Road and the up ramp outside the HKJC will be re-routed to one-way northbound traffic.
- * From about 35 minutes before the start of the last race, the following road sections will be closed to all vehicular traffic until traffic returns to normal:
 - the up ramp on Wong Nai Chung Road leading to the Aberdeen Tunnel outside the HKJC;
 - the section of Wong Nai Chung Road southbound between Queen's Road East and the up ramp leading to the Aberdeen Tunnel;
 - the section of Wong Nai Chung Road southbound between Village Road and the Public Stands of the HKJC;
 - the section of Leighton Road westbound between Wong Nai Chung Road and Canal Road East; and
 - the section of Morrison Hill Road southbound between Leighton Road and Queen's Road East.
- * During the period of road closure, franchised buses and green minibuses will be temporarily diverted until traffic returns to normal.
- * Some of the bus stops on Leighton Road, Morrison Hill Road and Wong Nai Chung Road and the tram stop on Wong Nai Chung Road outside the Hong Kong Cemetery will be suspended until traffic returns to normal. Public transport operators will put up notices at the affected stops to inform passengers of the temporary arrangements.
- * The taxi stand on Sung Tak Street will be suspended.
- * Parking spaces on Wong Nai Chung Road southbound between Sports Road and Blue Pool Road will be suspended.

The TD anticipates that the traffic in the vicinity of the affected areas will be very congested during horse race meetings. Motorists are advised to avoid driving to the affected areas. In cases of traffic congestion, motorists should exercise tolerance and patience, and follow the instructions given by the Police. Members of the public planning to go to the affected areas are advised to use public transport services as far as possible.

The TD and the Police will closely monitor the traffic situation and implement appropriate measures whenever necessary. Members of the public are advised to be alert to the latest traffic news on radio and television.

Details of the special traffic and transport arrangements are now available on the department's website (www.td.gov.hk).

Provisional statistics of retail sales for July 2018

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (August 30).

The value of total retail sales in July 2018, provisionally estimated at \$38.9 billion, increased by 7.8% over the same month in 2017. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in June 2018 increased by 11.9% over a year earlier. For the first seven months of 2018 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales increased by 12.6% over the same period in 2017.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in July 2018 increased by 5.9% over a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in June 2018 increased by 9.8% over a year earlier. For the first seven months of 2018 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales increased by 11.0% in volume over the same period in 2017.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing July 2018 with July 2017, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts increased by 16.8%. This was followed by sales of commodities in supermarkets (+0.7% in value); wearing apparel (+3.4%); medicines and cosmetics (+12.7%); commodities in department stores (+8.6%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods, not elsewhere classified (+5.7%); food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (+3.0%); other consumer goods, not elsewhere classified (+10.2%);

motor vehicles and parts (+6.7%); fuels (+15.2%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (+5.5%); furniture and fixtures (+3.7%); Chinese drugs and herbs (+0.8%); and optical shops (+2.3%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of books, newspapers, stationery and gifts decreased by 1.4% in July 2018 compared with a year earlier.

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 1.2% in the three months ending July 2018 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 1.4%.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. They cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

Commentary

A government spokesman indicated that retail sales grew visibly over a year earlier in July, albeit at a decelerated pace, thanks to solid demand from local consumers as well as visitors.

Looking ahead, favourable labour market conditions and sustained expansion in inbound tourism should continue to support retail sales performance in the near term. However, consumer sentiment may turn less sanguine going forward if the external uncertainties persist or escalate further. The Government will closely monitor the situation.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for June 2018 as well as the provisional figures for July 2018. The provisional figures on the value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet as well as the corresponding year-on-year changes for the first seven months of 2018 taken together are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for June 2018 as well as the provisional figures for July 2018. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first seven months of 2018 taken together are also shown.

Table 3 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=B1080003).

Alternatively, the historical series of retail sales statistics can be downloaded in the form of a statistical table at the website of the C&SD

(www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=D5600089).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk)

CS to visit Beijing

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, will depart for Beijing on Monday morning (September 3) to officiate at the inauguration ceremony of Tsinghua University, Executive Master of Public Administration Programme for the Project of Hong Kong Public Administrative Talents.

During the visit, Mr Cheung will also meet Mainland Government officials, senior management of Tsinghua University and advisors of the Project.

Mr Cheung will return to Hong Kong in the evening of the same day. During his absence, the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, will act as the Acting Chief Secretary for Administration.