

Cluster of Coronavirus cases in Siu Lam Hospital

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Siu Lam Hospital made the following announcement today (December 30):

Five patients (aged 46 to 61) in a male ward for severe intellectual disability have presented with respiratory symptoms since December 28. Appropriate viral tests were arranged for the patients and their test results were positive for Coronavirus OC43. The patients concerned are being treated under isolation and are in stable condition. Coronavirus OC43 is a known human coronavirus, which usually causes a mild respiratory infection such as the common cold.

Admission to the ward has been suspended and restricted visiting has been imposed. Infection control measures have been stepped up according to established guidelines. All other patients in the ward are under close surveillance.

The cases have been reported to the Hospital Authority Head Office and the Centre for Health Protection for follow-up.

External merchandise trade statistics for November 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (December 30) the external merchandise trade statistics for November 2019. In November 2019, the values of Hong Kong's total exports and imports of goods both recorded year-on-year decreases, at 1.4% and 5.8% respectively.

In November 2019, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 1.4% over a year earlier to \$359.3 billion, after a year-on-year decrease of 9.2% in October 2019. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 5.8% over a year earlier to \$385.4 billion in November 2019, after a year-on-year decrease of 11.5% in October 2019. A visible trade deficit of \$26.2 billion, equivalent to 6.8% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in November 2019.

For the first 11 months of 2019 as a whole, the value of total exports of goods dropped by 4.7% over the same period in 2018. Concurrently, the

value of imports of goods decreased by 6.9%. A visible trade deficit of \$394.0 billion, equivalent to 9.8% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in the first 11 months of 2019.

Comparing the three-month period ending November 2019 with the preceding three months on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods increased by 0.7%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 1.9%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing November 2019 with November 2018, total exports to Asia as a whole grew by 2.6%. In this region, increases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations, in particular Singapore (+8.0%), the Philippines (+7.3%), the mainland of China (the Mainland) (+5.2%), India (+1.1%) and Taiwan (+1.0%). On the other hand, decreases were recorded in the values of total exports to Japan (-15.9%), Thailand (-14.7%), Malaysia (-7.6%) and Vietnam (-7.0%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular the USA (-23.7%), Germany (-17.5%) and the United Kingdom (-8.8%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular India (-23.5%), Malaysia (-18.3%), the USA (-11.5%), Singapore (-9.8%) and the Mainland (-7.8%). Concurrently, increases were recorded in the values of imports from Vietnam (+55.6%) and Taiwan (+18.0%).

For the first 11 months of 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports to most major destinations, in particular the USA (-14.1%), India (-13.5%), Germany (-8.6%), Japan (-5.7%), the Mainland (-4.9%) and Vietnam (-4.1%). However, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of total exports to Singapore (+6.0%) and Taiwan (+1.9%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports from most major suppliers, in particular Korea (-22.8%), India (-19.6%), Malaysia (-14.6%), Singapore (-8.6%), Thailand (-8.1%) and the USA (-6.4%). The value of imports from the Mainland also decreased by 6.0%. On the other hand, the value of imports from Vietnam increased by 14.8%.

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing November 2019 with November 2018, decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$4.8 billion or -6.1%), "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$2.3 billion or -18.1%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$2.0 billion or -10.3%). However, increases were registered in the values of total

exports of "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$10.1 billion or 7.5%) and "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$4.7 billion or 96.4%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$3.9 billion or -11.4%), "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$3.4 billion or -21.7%) and "petroleum, petroleum products and related materials" (by \$3.1 billion or -32.0%). However, an increase was registered in the value of imports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$2.2 billion or 31.6%).

For the first 11 months of 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$47.1 billion or -11.5%), "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$39.0 billion or -2.7%) and "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$31.9 billion or -4.5%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of total exports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$18.9 billion or 36.6%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports of most principal commodity divisions, in particular "electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, and electrical parts thereof" (by \$101.4 billion or -6.2%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$61.2 billion or -16.0%) and "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$47.8 billion or -7.0%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports of "power generating machinery and equipment" (by \$17.1 billion or 25.1%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that the value of merchandise exports recorded a narrower year-on-year decline in November 2019, mainly due to a rebound in exports to the Mainland upon a low base of comparison. Exports to the major advanced economies stayed weak.

While the US and the Mainland have reached a first-phase trade agreement, global economic growth has yet to improve and the external environment is still subject to various uncertainties. 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 November 2019. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2016 to November 2019, and Table 3 gives the seasonally adjusted series for the same period.

The values of total exports of goods to 10 main destinations for

November 2019 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 November 2019.

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 November 2019 will be released in mid-January 2020.

The November 2019 issue of "Hong Kong External Merchandise Trade" contains detailed analysis on the performance of Hong Kong's external merchandise trade in November 2019 and will be available in mid-January 2020. 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).

[Grants approved from the Disaster Relief Fund in 2018-19](#)

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region released \$65.58 million from the Disaster Relief Fund in the year 2018-19 to support relief organisations in providing emergency relief to the victims of disasters occurring outside Hong Kong.

Grants amounting to \$65.58 million were disbursed for 21 programmes carried out by nine relief organisations, providing relief to earthquake, tsunami, typhoon and flood victims in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Mainland of China, Kenya and India. The number of beneficiaries was estimated to be around 430 000. The nine relief organisations concerned were World Vision Hong Kong; Amity Foundation, Hong Kong; Adventist Development and Relief Agency, China; Oxfam Hong Kong; Plan International Hong Kong; Save the Children Hong Kong; CEDAR Fund; Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Red Cross.

To cater for the different needs of the victims, a wide range of relief supplies had been distributed through the relief programmes, including food, quilts, hygiene and household items (such as water filters, mobile toilets, mosquito nets, kitchen utensils and portable solar powered lights) and temporary shelter materials and tools (such as tarpaulins, ropes and floor mats) as well as education kits and emergency classroom kits (such as books and stationeries). From the feedback gathered by the relief organisations,

the victims were very grateful for the timely assistance provided by the Disaster Relief Fund.

Relief organisations receiving grants from the Disaster Relief Fund are required to submit evaluation reports and audited accounts on the use of the grants to the Government after the completion of the relief programmes.

The Disaster Relief Fund, administered by the Administration Wing under the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, provides an effective channel for the Government to respond swiftly to appeals for humanitarian aid in relief of disasters that occur outside Hong Kong. The annual report on the activities of the Fund for the year 2018-19, photos of the relief programmes and feedback from the victims have been uploaded onto the website of the Administration Wing at www.admwing.gov.hk/eng/links/drfund.htm.

The Disaster Relief Fund is replenished by the Government at the start of each financial year and, as necessary, during the financial year, depending on calls for relief and the size of the Fund balance and commitments.

The Disaster Relief Fund Advisory Committee is responsible for advising the Government on the policy and practices regarding the disbursement of funds for disaster relief, specific amounts of grants made to the applicants as well as monitoring the use of grants.

The Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. Members include Mr Ip Kwok-him, Dr Lam Ching-choi, Dr Helena Wong Pik-wan, Mr Kenneth Lau Ip-keung, Dr Tik Chi-yuen, Mrs Ann Kung Yeung Yun-chi, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Monday, December 30, 2019 is 106.1 (down 0.2 against last Saturday's index).

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Saturday, December 28, 2019 was 106.3 (down 0.1 against last Friday's index).

“Aberdeen – Cheung Chau” ferry service

to cease operation on January 1

The Transport Department (TD) today (December 30) announced that the ferry service between Aberdeen and Cheung Chau will cease operation from January 1, 2020.

A spokesman for the TD explained, "The Government understands that outlying island ferry services provide indispensable external links for residents, yet the business environment has been very difficult. Hence, the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address proposes to provide 14 outlying island ferry routes (including the "Aberdeen – Cheung Chau" ferry route) (Note 1) with Special Helping Measures in order to enhance the financial viability of the ferry services, and to launch a new Vessel Subsidy Scheme to replace the fleets of 11 ferry routes (including the "Aberdeen – Cheung Chau" ferry route) (Note 2) and introduce greener vessels."

The spokesman said, "After receiving the operator Maris Ferry Service Limited's notification of terminating the ferry service because of an operating deficit, the TD invited interested parties for Expression of Interest (EOI) in operating the "Aberdeen – Cheung Chau" ferry service twice in October and December this year respectively in order to continue operating the ferry service. As the TD did not receive any EOI submission in the first invitation for EOI, the TD relaxed the requirements for the frequency and the carrying capacity of the vessel as well as shortened the operating hours in the invitation document of the second invitation for EOI. The relaxation was aimed at reducing the operating costs to attract interested parties to operate the ferry service. By the close of the second invitation for EOI on December 23, the TD did not receive any EOI submission. However, any ferry operator interested in operating the ferry service in the future is welcome to submit an application to the TD. The TD will consider the application in accordance with the established procedures (including invitations to interested parties for EOI).

After cessation of the ferry service, the affected passengers may take the "Central – Cheung Chau" outlying island ferry service. The TD has been monitoring passenger demand and observed that the carrying capacity currently provided by the "Central – Cheung Chau" ferry route can meet passenger demand.

The ferry operator has already put up notices at ferry piers and on board ferries to inform passengers of the service termination. The TD will closely monitor passenger demand after the service termination and will discuss with the ferry operator of the "Central – Cheung Chau" outlying island ferry route about enhancing the level of service, if necessary.

Note 1: These 14 routes are "Central – Cheung Chau", "Inter-islands" (plying between Peng Chau, Mui Wo, Chi Ma Wan and Cheung Chau), "Central – Mui Wo", "Central – Peng Chau", "Central – Yung Shue Wan", "Central – Sok Kwu Wan", "Aberdeen – Cheung Chau", "Aberdeen – Yung Shue Wan via Pak Kok Tsuen", "Aberdeen – Sok Kwu Wan via Mo Tat", "Tuen Mun – Tung Chung – Sha Lo Wan –

Tai O", "Discovery Bay – Mui Wo", "Ma Wan – Central", "Ma Wan – Tsuen Wan" and "Central – Discovery Bay".

Note 2: These 11 routes are "Central – Cheung Chau", "Inter-islands" (plying between Peng Chau, Mui Wo, Chi Ma Wan and Cheung Chau), "Central – Mui Wo", "Central – Peng Chau", "Central – Yung Shue Wan", "Central – Sok Kwu Wan", "Aberdeen – Cheung Chau", "Aberdeen – Yung Shue Wan via Pak Kok Tsuen", "Aberdeen – Sok Kwu Wan via Mo Tat", "Tuen Mun – Tung Chung – Sha Lo Wan – Tai O" and "Discovery Bay – Mui Wo".