

Opening remarks by SDEV at press conference on proposed enhancements to ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements for govt development clearance exercises (with video)

Following are the opening remarks by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, at a press conference today (May 10) on the proposed enhancements to general ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements for the Government's development clearance exercises:

In line with the "people-oriented" philosophy of the current-term Government, we propose enhancements to the existing ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements for the Government's development clearance exercises to address the needs of affected clearerees. We believe that our proposal fairly and pragmatically balances the use of public money, public housing resources and community and stakeholders' expectations.

Our proposal comprises the following key features:

- (a) replacing "project-specific" packages with a unified as well as enhanced general ex-gratia compensation and rehousing package applicable to all future government development clearance exercises;
- (b) offering non-means tested rehousing for eligible households in dedicated rehousing estates to be developed and managed by the Hong Kong Housing Society;
- (c) suitably relaxing the eligibility criteria and increasing the amount of cash ex-gratia allowances;
- (d) offering appropriate ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements for eligible households residing in surveyed/licensed non-domestic structures; and
- (e) relaxing the eligibility criteria of applicable ex-gratia allowances for business undertakings on brownfields and in squatters.

Subject to the Legislative Council Finance Committee's approval of the parts involving ex-gratia allowances, the proposed enhancements, including the enhanced rehousing arrangements, will take effect at the same time. The unified as well as enhanced general package will be applicable to all eligible persons who have not yet received government compensation or rehousing as of the respective announcement date in respect of any on-going or future land resumption and clearance exercises. The announcement date of

the proposal for domestic occupants and business undertakings in squatters is today (i.e. May 10, 2018), while that of the proposal for business undertakings on brownfields is April 11, 2017 (i.e. the date when the Government announced the extended ex-gratia allowance arrangement last year).

Steering Group discusses new conceptual designs for recycling bins and litter containers in public places

â€‹The Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, chaired the sixth meeting of the Steering Group on the Modification of Recycling and Refuse Collection Facilities in Public Places today (May 10) to discuss new conceptual designs for recycling bins (RBs) and litter containers (LCs) in public places.

The Steering Group had earlier commissioned a Stage 2 consultancy study to review the existing designs of RBs and LCs in public places and to propose new designs. Prior to developing new conceptual designs for RBs and LCs, the consultants had conducted public engagement activities through various channels to solicit views from the general public and relevant stakeholders, including citizens, tourists, front-line cleaning workers, recyclers and green groups. Based on the collected views, baseline analysis of international experiences, and preliminary design parameters proposed in the Stage 1 consultancy study, the consultants put forward some proposed conceptual designs to the Steering Group.

The Steering Group considered that the new designs of RBs and LCs should encompass various elements. In addition to having conspicuous colours, RBs and LCs in various settings should be coherent in their designs to enable easy identification by the public. Apart from hygiene and durability considerations, the new designs should also care for the operational needs of front-line workers and facilitate their emptying of RBs and LCs. RBs should also allow for flexible combinations of individual compartments to meet the actual operational needs. For instance, the compartment for collecting plastic bottles should be larger in certain settings.

Meanwhile, considering that the Mainland has started to tighten the import standards for recycling materials since the beginning of this year, including imposing more stringent requirements on the purity required of paper recyclables, as well as views collected in public engagement activities, the Steering Group agreed that "mixed RBs" involving collection of waste paper together with other recyclables should not be introduced in public spaces at this stage.

After discussion, the Steering Group adopted some conceptual designs proposed by the consultants. Following the adopted conceptual designs, the consultants will make refinements and develop the detailed designs of RBs and LCs and relevant prototypes, as well as consult the public in the end of 2018 to collect the views of citizens, front-line workers and relevant stakeholders. The consultants will then report the findings and make recommendations to the Steering Group.

To complement the implementation of municipal solid waste charging, the Steering Group was set up in February 2016 to review the design and distribution of recycling and refuse collection facilities in public places and recommend necessary modifications to facilitate waste reduction and resource recovery in the community. Chaired by the Secretary for the Environment, the Steering Group comprises members from the design, architectural, planning, academia and business sectors as well as non-profit making groups, district personalities and relevant government departments.

Mediation Week 2018 to start tomorrow

Mediation Week 2018, organised by the Department of Justice (DoJ), will run from tomorrow (May 11) with a series of initiatives throughout the week to highlight the benefits of the use of mediation to resolve disputes in various sectors.

"The theme this time is 'Mediate First – Exploring New Horizons'. It seeks to look ahead at future developments including online dispute resolution and the use of mediation in resolving international commercial disputes," a spokesman for the DoJ said.

"There will be a series of activities including a Mediation Conference, seminars and a carnival so as to provide the opportunity for more to understand the benefits of the use of mediation across various sectors. It will also include the 4th Shanghai-Hong Kong Commercial Mediation Forum co-organised by the DoJ," the spokesman added.

The seminars will cover the use of mediation in various sectors such as medical and health, the entertainment industry, education, the workplace and cross-border commercial disputes. It will also explore the use and development of evaluation in mediation.

"The seminar on Mediation and the Entertainment Industry on May 15 is yet another initiative in introducing mediation to the entertainment and arts sectors. This seminar will feature a mock mediation of disputes arising from film scriptwriting and an experience sharing session with an experienced mediator and stakeholders of the entertainment industry," the spokesman said.

The Mediation Carnival on May 13 will be held at the recently completed

West Kowloon Mediation Centre, adjacent to the West Kowloon Law Courts Building in Ying Wah Street West, Sham Shui Po. Members of the public are most welcome to participate.

"The highlight of Mediation Week is the Mediation Conference 2018 to be held on May 18. Over 20 leading international and local experts and practitioners will gather and share their views and experiences on the latest global developments of mediation. The Conference will explore the recent developments of mediation in Hong Kong and overseas, how mediation may contribute to resolving disputes arising from the Belt and Road and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area development initiatives, online dispute resolution, and the use of mediation in resolving international commercial disputes," the spokesman noted.

The co-organisers of Mediation Week 2018 are the Labour Department, the Insurance Authority, the Employees' Compensation Insurance Residual Scheme Bureau, Rotary District 3450, the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, the Hong Kong Society for Healthcare Mediation, the Hospital Authority, Hong Kong Patients' Voices, the Hong Kong Mediation Council, the Hong Kong Mediation Centre, the Society for Community Organization, the Hong Kong Institute of Arbitrators, the Mainland-Hong Kong Joint Mediation Center, the Hong Kong Institute of Mediation and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council.

For more details of the activities of Mediation Week 2018, please visit www.doj.gov.hk/mediatefirst/eng/programme2018.html. Except for the Mediation Carnival, pre-registration is required for all other events on a first-come, first-served basis.

Harbour Road Sports Centre temporarily closed

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (May 10) that due to an unforeseen incident, Harbour Road Sports Centre in Wan Chai District has been temporarily closed until further notice.

Volume and price statistics of

external merchandise trade in March 2018

Further to the external merchandise trade statistics in value terms for March 2018 released earlier on, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (May 10) the volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade for that month.

In March 2018, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods increased by 5.3% over March 2017. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods increased by 8.1%.

For the first quarter of 2018 as a whole, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods increased by 7.3% over the same period in 2017. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods increased by 8.2%.

Comparing the first quarter of 2018 with the fourth quarter of 2017 on a seasonally adjusted basis, the volume of total exports of goods increased by 2.2%. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods increased by 2.9%.

Changes in volume of external merchandise trade are derived from changes in external merchandise trade value with the effect of price changes discounted.

Comparing March 2018 with March 2017, the prices of total exports of goods increased by 2.5%. Concurrently, the prices of imports of goods increased by 2.5%.

As regards price changes in the first quarter of 2018 over the same period in 2017, the prices of total exports of goods increased by 2.3%. Concurrently, the prices of imports of goods increased by 2.3%.

Price changes in external merchandise trade are reflected by changes in unit value indices of external merchandise trade, which are compiled based on average unit values or, for certain commodities, specific price data.

The terms of trade index is derived from the ratio of price index of total exports of goods to that of imports of goods. Compared with the same periods in 2017, the index remained virtually unchanged in both March 2018 and the first quarter of 2018.

Changes in the unit value and volume of total exports of goods by main destination are shown in Table 1.

Comparing March 2018 with March 2017, a double-digit growth of 13.7% was recorded for the total export volume to the mainland of China (the Mainland). On the other hand, the total export volume to Vietnam, Japan and the USA decreased by 0.5%, 2.6% and 3.3% respectively, while the total export volume to India decreased substantially, by 35.9%.

Over the same period of comparison, the total export prices to the Mainland, the USA, Japan and India increased by 3.0%, 2.5%, 2.1% and 0.3% respectively. On the other hand, the total export prices to Vietnam decreased by 0.5%.

Changes in the unit value and volume of imports of goods by main supplier are shown in Table 2.

Comparing March 2018 with March 2017, the import volume from Taiwan increased substantially, by 32.5%. Concurrently, the import volume from Singapore, Korea and the Mainland increased by 19.8%, 9.0% and 0.8% respectively. On the other hand, the import volume from Japan slightly decreased by 0.2%.

Over the same period of comparison, the import prices from all main suppliers increased: Korea (+5.6%), Taiwan (+2.1%), the Mainland (+2.0%), Japan (+1.4%) and Singapore (+1.4%).

Further information

Details of the above statistics are published in the March 2018 issue of "Hong Kong Merchandise Trade Index Numbers". Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp?productCode=B1020006).

Enquiries on merchandise trade indices may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4918).