

External merchandise trade statistics for March 2019

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (April 29) the external merchandise trade statistics for March 2019. In March 2019, the values of Hong Kong's total exports and imports of goods both recorded year-on-year decreases, at 1.2% and 0.1% respectively.

In March 2019, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 1.2% over a year earlier to \$343.6 billion, after a year-on-year decrease of 6.9% in February 2019. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 0.1% over a year earlier to \$402.9 billion in March 2019, after a year-on-year decrease of 3.8% in February 2019. A visible trade deficit of \$59.2 billion, equivalent to 14.7% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in March 2019.

For the first quarter of 2019 as a whole, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 2.4% over the same period in 2018. Concurrently, the value of imports of goods decreased by 3.2%. A visible trade deficit of \$118.7 billion, equivalent to 11.4% of the value of imports of goods, was recorded in the first quarter of 2019.

Comparing the first quarter of 2019 with the preceding quarter on a seasonally adjusted basis, the value of total exports of goods decreased by 2.1%. Meanwhile, the value of imports of goods decreased by 2.4%.

Analysis by country/territory

Comparing March 2019 with March 2018, total exports to Asia as a whole went down by 6.0%. In this region, decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations, in particular India (-11.2%) and the mainland of China (the Mainland) (-10.1%). On the other hand, increases were recorded in the values of total exports to the Philippines (+45.6%), Singapore (+23.8%), Taiwan (+14.6%) and Malaysia (+12.7%).

Apart from destinations in Asia, increases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations in other regions, in particular the United Kingdom (+29.4%) and Germany (+15.9%). Concurrently, a decrease was registered in the value of total exports to the USA (-0.3%).

Over the same period of comparison, decreases were registered in the values of imports from some major suppliers, in particular Taiwan (-25.5%), Thailand (-20.7%), India (-14.4%) and Korea (-11.4%). Concurrently, increases were recorded in the values of imports from Switzerland (+22.6%), the USA (+12.4%) and the Mainland (+7.4%).

For the first quarter of 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of total exports to some major destinations, in

particular India (-28.4%), Taiwan (-11.3%), the USA (-8.5%), the Mainland (-6.6%) and Japan (-3.2%). However, year-on-year increases were registered in the values of total exports to Singapore (+17.7%) and the Netherlands (+11.8%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year decreases were registered in the values of imports from most major suppliers, in particular Korea (-23.4%), Taiwan (-16.9%), India (-14.7%), Thailand (-13.6%) and Malaysia (-8.2%). The value of imports from the Mainland also went down by 0.4%. On the other hand, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports from the USA (+5.4%).

Analysis by major commodity

Comparing March 2019 with March 2018, decreases 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 \$9.2 billion or -6.6%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$5.3 billion or -13.8%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$1.1 billion or -5.6%). However, an increase was registered in the value of total exports of "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$6.1 billion or 10.6%).

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 \$8.4 billion or -5.2%) and "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$3.8 billion or -10.6%). However, increases were registered in the values of imports of "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$5.2 billion or 9.3%) and "miscellaneous manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$3.0 billion or 12.5%).

For the first quarter of 2019 as a whole, year-on-year decreases 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 \$14.6 billion or -4.1%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$12.1 billion or -11.6%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$2.2 billion or -4.7%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of total exports of "telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus and equipment" (by \$9.4 billion or 5.8%).

Over the same period of comparison, year-on-year 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 \$31.1 billion or -7.7%), "office machines and automatic data processing machines" (by \$6.7 billion or -7.4%) and "non-metallic mineral manufactures" (by \$1.9 billion or -3.5%). However, a year-on-year increase was registered in the value of imports of "miscellaneous

manufactured articles (mainly jewellery, goldsmiths' and silversmiths' wares)" (by \$3.4 billion or 5.7%).

Commentary

A Government spokesman said that merchandise exports remained subdued in recent months, as the adverse external environment continued to dampen manufacturing and trading activities in the region. The value of merchandise exports fell by 1.2% from a year earlier in March, and by 2.4% for the first quarter as a whole.

The external trading environment will remain challenging in the near term. While reportedly the US-Mainland trade talks have made progress, the global economy, being overshadowed by various uncertainties, has lost some momentum. The Government will remain vigilant.

Further information

Table 1 at the annex presents the analysis of external merchandise trade statistics for March 2019. Table 2 presents the original monthly trade statistics from January 2016 to March 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 March 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 March 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 March 2019 will be released in mid-May 2019.

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