

Retail sales in S. Korea fall on weak domestic demand

SEOUL, May 23 (Xinhua) -- Retail sales in South Korea decreased last month as domestic demand remained in the doldrums amid the sluggish economic recovery, a government report showed Thursday. Total sales at three major discount outlets, including E-Mart, Lotte Mart and Homeplus, declined 9.8 percent in April from a year earlier, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE). Combined sales at three major department stores, including Lotte, Shinsegae and Hyundai, fell 1.9 percent on-year last month. The fall came amid the still fragile sentiment among South Korean consumers stemming from household debts, the flagging economic recovery and real estate market slump. Grocery sales, which account for more than half of sales for the discount chains, fell 9.3 percent in April from a year ago, keeping its downward trend. Demand for clothing sank 17.7 percent last month due to the unusually low temperature, while sales of consumer electronics and sports-related items retreated 6.8 percent and 12.2 percent respectively. As for the major department stores, foodstuff sales increased 2.9 percent on-year in April due to a rise in sales of restaurants. Clothing demand was weak, with sales of suits, casuals and men's clothing falling 7.9 percent, 6.7 percent and 10.4 percent respectively.