



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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ACP projects head towards completion

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The Airport Core Programme (ACP), one of the world's largest infrastructure projects, is on schedule for progressive completion, the Director of the New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office, Mr Billy Lam, said today (Saturday) at an international conference which is being held in San Francisco.

He told the Worldwide Infrastructure Partnerships Conference sponsored by Forbes Magazine that eight of the 10 ACP projects will be open for public use in the coming months starting next week. More than 500 international experts are attending the conference.

These eight projects include the world's largest road and rail suspension bridge, cross-harbour and road tunnels as well as expressways. Together they will form a 34-kilometre transport corridor linking Hong Kong Island to the new town at Tung Chung near the replacement airport at Chek Lap Kok.

"The opening of the transport corridor marks a major new chapter in the history of Hong Kong's infrastructure development. To commemorate the occasion, the Hong Kong Government is planning to hold a series of exciting events.

"A number of opening ceremonies will be held to commemorate the completion of the projects. These will culminate in a ceremony at the Lantau Link to symbolise the completion of the entire transport corridor.

"The first two projects to open are the West Kowloon Expressway and Kwai Chung Viaduct. They will be opened to traffic on Thursday following an opening ceremony on the previous day. This will be followed by the opening of the Sai Yin Pun section of Route 7 on February 26 following an opening ceremony on the day before.

"On May 21, the other components of the ACP transport corridor, that is the Rambler Channel Bridge, Cheung Ching Tunnel, North Lantau Expressway, Western Harbour Crossing, and Lantau Link, will also open to traffic," Mr Lam added.

Mr Lam said celebration events would include an international marathon race. There would also be charity walks along the Lantau Link and the Western Harbour Crossing. He invited participants of the conference "to come and join us in celebrating this important milestone for Hong Kong".

Mr Lam said that at the end of December 1996, the Government's seven ACP projects were 94 per cent complete, while the new airport, the airport railway and the Western Harbour Crossing were 74 per cent, 65 per cent and 97 per cent complete respectively.

"The three reclamation projects at Tung Chung, West Kowloon and Central under the ACP will all be completed by June 1997 as scheduled. The airport and the airport railway remain on target for completion in April and June 1998 respectively," he added.

Mr Lam described the ACP as "a solid example of international partnership and co-operation in one of the largest infrastructure projects in the world".

He said that in line with Hong Kong's traditional free trade and "open door" policy as an international centre of trade, finance, aviation and communications, the Government encouraged international participation in ACP projects.

The ACP had drawn participation from 18 countries around the world, including Japan, UK, China, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Spain, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Germany, Italy, South Africa and Austria. By the end of December 1996, a total of 170 major contracts valued at more than \$95.8 billion had been awarded.

"We have operated on the basis of a level playing field in the award of contracts. No country or company is given preferential treatment, and no restrictions of any kind are imposed on grounds of nationality. This approach stems from the basic principle of fair and open competition which is fundamental to Hong Kong's economic success.

"The level playing field approach will continue after the change of sovereignty on July 1, 1997," he noted.

Mr Lam pointed out that rigorous cost control on works and an effective project management system had ensured that the ACP would be completed on time and within budget.

"While many major infrastructure projects overseas have been hit by massive cost over-runs, we have been able to reduce costs and to have done it twice. We also have managed to reduce the ACP budget from \$163,730 million to \$156,364 million," he said.

The Government has invested \$111,000 million, representing about 71 per cent of the total cost, while the rest has been financed either in the form of direct investment by franchisees in airport services and the Western Harbour Crossing, or loans for the construction of the new airport and the airport railway.

"The ACP is a sound investment in the future of Hong Kong and it is also the key to ensuring that Hong Kong's success story will continue into the next century. It is also a solid example of partnership between the public and private sectors," Mr Lam said.

End

Warning to people smuggling articles into prisons

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A former prisoner who smuggled unauthorised articles into a prison on Lantau Island has been jailed for eight months. This was the first time someone had been sent to prison for such an offence.

The incident occurred on January 15 during a visit to Tong Fuk Centre where he passed three \$500 notes to an inmate inside the visit room. The money was discovered by Correctional Services Department staff during a routine search and the case was reported to the police.

The former prisoner, Leung Shui-cheung, pleaded guilty to a charge of Introduction of Unauthorised Articles into Prison when he appeared in Eastern Magistracy On February 4 and was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment.

A spokesman for the Correctional Services Department said today (Saturday) that the case is a serious warning to people who think they can smuggle items to prisoners.

End

Opening of Legal Aid Department's new office

Starting from Monday (February 17), the Legal Aid Department will have an office on the ground floor of the Mongkok Government Offices, adjacent to the Yau Tsim Mong District Office.

The Kowloon Branch Office Extension is necessary to cope with the increase in the number of civil legal aid applications. The number of legal aid criminal and civil applications in 1996 has increased by 17.6% to a total of 30,000.

The department's Kowloon Branch Office on the 3rd floor of Mongkok Government Offices at 30 Luen Wan Street has been established for some years to serve the population in Kowloon and the New Territories.

To meet the increased demand for legal aid services, the department has recently acquired an additional office space of about 115 square metres on the ground floor of the same building.

The new office will be used entirely to serve new applicants who need not go up to the 3rd floor office for enquiries and processing of their applications.

For general enquiries, members of the public may continue to make use of the telephone hotline which will remain unchanged at 2537 7677.

The new office will be opened by Chairman of the Legal Aid Services Council, Mr Lee Jark-pui, and Director of Legal Aid, Mr Chan Shu-ying, at 11 am.

End

Sai Wan Ho Fire Station open day

Sai Wan Ho Fire Station will be open to members of the public from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm tomorrow (Sunday).

The event, being part of the Fire Services Department's effort to promote the 1996/97 Fire Prevention Campaign, is the last one of a series of open days held throughout the territory.

Members of the public visiting the fire station will have a chance to learn more about fire prevention.

They can see various types of modern fire appliances such as Hydraulic Platform, Turntable Ladder, Major Pump, Light Rescue Unit, Mobile Command Unit, Emergency Tender and Mobile Casualty Treatment Centre.

They can also see various kinds of fire-fighting and rescue equipment, including rescue cushion, slice cutting set, power lifting bags, fireman's chemical protection suit, survivor detection system, thermal imaging camera and defibrillator.

Two fire-fighting and rescue demonstrations by firemen will take place at 11.20 am and 2.30 pm respectively.

There will be a set of display boards on fire safety advice. A video tape on fire prevention in industrial premises will also be shown.

Officers from the Department's Fire Protection Bureau will be on hand to give fire safety advice and to distribute information leaflets to visitors.

Sai Wan Ho Fire Station is located at 20 Wai Hang Street, Sai Wan Ho, Hong Kong.

End

Three Committees set up under AAB

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The Antiquities Advisory Board agreed at its first meeting for the term 1997-98 today (Saturday) to establish three Committees to carry out the work of the Board.

They are the Historical Buildings and Structures Committee, the Archaeological and Palaeontological Committee, and the Education and Publicity Committee, to be chaired by Dr Elizabeth Sinn, Dr Michael Lau and Ms Jane Cheng respectively.

The meeting also agreed to recommend two applications for licences to conduct archaeological surveys, one at Yuen Long by Mr Au Ka-fat and the other at Hong Kong Island by Mrs Pamela Rogers.

End

Souvenir cover for Singapore Stamp Exhibition on sale

The Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman announced today (Saturday) that a prestigious souvenir cover will be issued next week to commemorate Hong Kong Post Office's participation in Singapore '97 National Stamp Exhibition (Singpex'97).

The Singpex'97 will be held from February 21 to 23 in Singapore, he said.

The souvenir cover will be placed on sale at all post offices at \$2 each as from February 17 (Monday).

On February 21, a hand-back service will be provided at all post offices to official and privately made covers bearing an indication of the exhibition.

A special postmark and a cachet for general cancellation purpose will also be introduced on the same day.

End

HK welcomes conclusion of basic telecom negotiations

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The Secretary for Trade and Industry, Miss Denise Yue, today (Sunday) welcomed the successful conclusion of the negotiations on basic telecommunications services conducted under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The agreement reached in Geneva yesterday (February 15) will open up a huge market globally, estimated at US\$600 billion per annum, for basic telecoms services. A total of 69 member governments have made various levels of binding commitments to open up their telecoms markets, accounting for over 90% of the global value of basic telecom services. The commitments made will come into effect on January 1, 1998.

"We are very pleased with the outcome of the negotiations. The package of offers presents substantial market access opportunities for our service suppliers, and provides a greater degree of certainty and predictability for telecoms investors," Miss Yue said.

Consumers will also benefit significantly from the liberalisation of the basic telecoms market. More competition in the market place is bound to foster more rapid technological advancement, reduce service charges and bring about improvements to the quality of services.

"The negotiations on basic telecommunications were protracted and difficult. We are therefore particularly pleased that the negotiations were concluded with a substantially improved package of offers and a broad level of participation from both developed and developing members of the WTO," Miss Yue said.

She said the successful conclusion of the negotiations demonstrated WTO members' commitment to the progressive liberalisation of their telecoms market. It also set a good example for the financial services negotiations to be resumed in April this year, and injected further impetus into the global liberalisation efforts.

Hong Kong's commitments under the agreement include the opening of its local telecoms services and a range of international telecoms services which have been ruled to be outside the licence of the Hong Kong Telecommunications International. The latter include, among others, call back services and international simple resale of fax and data services.

In addition to market liberalisation undertakings, the majority of participants to the negotiations, including Hong Kong, have committed to observe a common set of regulatory principles to ensure fair competition among all suppliers of telecom services.

The basic telecoms negotiations were originally scheduled to end last April. To allow more time for further consultations on outstanding issues, participants agreed to set a new deadline of February 15, 1997. Participants were also allowed to make adjustments to their commitments made last April during a one-month period between January 15 and February 15, 1997.

End

Treasury Secretary to make duty visit to New Zealand

The Secretary for Treasury, Mr K C Kwong, will depart for New Zealand this (Sunday) evening for a duty visit to study the country's public sector reform programme.

He will lead a high-level delegation, comprising the Director of Accounting Services, Mr Brian Dagnall, the Deputy Secretary for the Civil Services, Mr Patrick Lau, and the Deputy Head of the Efficiency Unit, Mr Joseph Lai. They will stay in Wellington from February 18 to 21.

During the four-day visit, Mr Kwong and his delegation will hold meetings with the New Zealand Minister of Finance, the Rt. Hon W. F. Birch, senior government officials as well as chief executives of the country's major public utilities to exchange views and experience on their public sector reforms.

Mr Kwong will return to Hong Kong on Sunday (February 23) evening.

End

The 7th Education & Careers Expo

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The public are given a golden chance to get the most comprehensive and updated information on careers, education and training opportunities at the 7th Education & Careers Expo to be held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre from February 20 to 23.

Jointly organised by the Labour Department and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), the Expo is the largest of its kind ever held in Hong Kong. It consists of an education section organised by the HKTDC and a careers section staged by the Labour Department.

Senior Labour Officer (Careers & Employment Agencies), Mrs Louisa Poon, said today (Sunday) that the Expo provided a forum where the young people could gain a better understanding of the labour market by having face-to-face contacts with experienced professionals from various fields and by attending seminars and video shows on different industries.

"We hope to assist the young people in mapping out their future career and the members of the public in further enhancing their career planning," Mrs Poon said.

She noted that the response from schools to the Expo was overwhelming as around 12,000 students from over 120 schools had enrolled for the group visit programme.

"The Labour Department occupies a total of four booths and adopts an integrated approach in the presentation of its various employment services including Job Matching Programme, employment service for the people with a disability and careers education for the youth," Mrs Poon added.

The Expo is participated by about 183 exhibitors from various trades, government departments, professional bodies as well as local and overseas educational institutes.

It opens from 10.30 am to 7.30 pm on February 20, 10 am to 7.30 pm on February 21 and 22, and 10 am to 6 pm on February 23. Admission is free.

End

Sixth activity centre for overseas domestic helpers opens

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A new activity centre for overseas domestic helpers (ODHs) to spend their rest day is opened today (Sunday), bringing to six the total number of Sunday-only activity centres.

Located at the King George V School at 2 Tin Kwong Road in Ma Tau Wai, Kowloon, the centre will provide a venue for ODH groups to organise educational, sports and recreational activities for about 370 participants.

The other five Sunday-only activity centres are at Clementi Secondary School and Po Leung Kuk Yu Lee Mo Fan Memorial School in North Point; Ho Tung Technical School for Girls in Causeway Bay; Jockey Club Government Secondary Technical School in Kowloon Tong; and Kowloon Technical School in Sham Shui Po.

Two full-time service centres are also operating in Kennedy Town and Mong Kok.

All the ODH Centres are set up under a Government scheme implemented in September 1994 by the Home Affairs Department to provide alternative venues for ODHs to gather on their day off.

All the centres are managed by The Hong Kong Bayanihan Trust which is a non-profit making organisation founded in 1993 by a group of Filipino businessmen in Hong Kong with the objective of providing sheltered facilities for organising social, cultural and vocational activities for ODHs.

Officiating guests at the opening of the King George V School activity centre were the Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs, Ms Linda So; the Executive Director of The Hong Kong Bayanihan Trust, Mr Juan Ignacio Ramos; and the Deputy Principal of King George V School, Mrs Elizabeth Muscroft.

End

Prompt collection of BN(O) Passports

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Applicants who have been notified to collect their British National (Overseas) passports should pick up their passports promptly from the date when the passports are ready for collection at their chosen immigration offices, a spokesperson of the Immigration Department appealed today (Sunday).

Currently, there are around 54,400 prepared BN(O) passports ready for collection by applicants at various immigration offices.

With effect from April 1997, the British Trade Commission will take over from the Hong Kong Immigration Department responsibility for application and issuing of BN(O) passports. All uncollected passports at the immigration offices by then will be transferred to the Passport Section of the British Trade Commission.

For their convenience, applicants are reminded to pick up their passports in time at the immigration offices which have been chosen by them upon application. They will be required to collect their passports at the British Trade Commission if they do not do so before the transfer of passport functions in April 1997.

For enquiries, members of the public may telephone 2824 1177 (English), 2824 1717 (Chinese) or use fax line 2877 7711.

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Fresh water cut in Sai Kung

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Fresh water supply to some premises in Sai Kung will be suspended from 11 pm on Wednesday (February 19) to 6 am the following day for waste detection work on watermains.

The suspension will affect Fu Yiu Ha Village and all premises in the area bounded by Yi Chun Street, Po Tung Road, Hiram's Highway, Sai Kung Road and Sai Kung seafront.

End