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The way forward for a more liberalised telecoms market

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The Government is fully committed to fair trade and competition in its telecommunications policy, the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Stephen Ip, said today (Wednesday) when releasing the Administration's response to the Consumer Council's report "Achieving Competition in the Liberalised Telecommunications Market".

"There are some 23 recommendations in the Report and many of these have already been implemented or are being implemented," he said.

"We liberalised the fixed telecommunications network market in July 1995 and have currently entered into a dialogue with Hong Kong Telecom International Limited (HKTI) on the existing arrangements for Hong Kong's international telecommunications sector to see whether these arrangements are best suited to the continued development of the Government's policy of maintaining Hong Kong as the pre-eminent telecommunications hub in the Asia-Pacific region."

Commenting on specific proposals by the Consumer Council, Mr Ip said there were already licence conditions requiring for the clear separation of functions between Hong Kong Telephone Company Limited (HKTC) and its affiliates as well as for carriers to exchange information on interconnection and sharing of facilities and for the Telecommunications Authority (TA) to issue directions on sharing of facilities among licensees.

He was pleased that HKTC had concluded commercial agreements on interconnection with New T and T Hong Kong Limited and New World Telephone Limited on May 31 and August 10 respectively.

"On tariff, the Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) is now analysing comments received during a large-scale public consultation on the review of the pricing structure of local telephone services (including interconnection charge) which just closed on July 22," Mr Ip said.

He said following the issue of a TA statement on April 23 defining HKTI's exclusive operating right, the Government and HKTI had recently entered into a dialogue on the existing arrangements for Hong Kong's international telecommunications sector.

On the question of tariff rebalancing, the Government agreed with the Consumer Council that it should be achieved in the long run, he said: "We shall take into account the level of competition in the market as well as the public's acceptance of the change in so doing."

As for universal service, he said, the Government agreed that all fixed network operators should be allowed to compete to provide universal service and intended to do so in the medium-term future when network rollout of the new fixed network operators became mature.

"On quality of service, the TA, as suggested by the Consumer Council, will consider issuing a guideline to fixed network operators on what to include in their customer charters," he said.

Noting the Consumer Council's call for an early introduction of a comprehensive Telecommunication Ordinance to more clearly define TA's policy objectives, responsibilities and other related issues, Mr Ip said this would be addressed by a bill to amend the Telecommunication Ordinance in the 1996-97 legislative year.

However, he said, the Government did not consider it necessary to set up a statutory advisory board to tender advice to the TA on key telecommunications issues.

"The existing consultative mechanisms are working well and have a high degree of transparency: the TA is served by four advisory committees on telecommunications issues; public consultations are conducted on important issues; and the Legislative Council and its Economic Services Panel are also consulted on important telecommunications issues," Mr Ip said.

On the Consumer Council's proposal for the creation of a Secretary for Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Communications Technology, Mr Ip said: "This recommendation has already been considered in the context of Government Response to the Consumer Council Report on Broadcasting.

"We consider it unnecessary to combine policy responsibilities of broadcasting and telecommunications. But we are prepared to review this in the light of technological development and the review on broadcasting scheduled for 1998."

He added that the Government also could not support in full the technical proposal to give statutory force to OFTA's guidelines for property owners, developers and managers for the provision of facilities within property developments for access to public telecommunications and broadcasting services as there were no such access requirements for other utilities.

"As an alternative, OFTA is now working with the Buildings Department to look into the possibility of incorporating telecommunications access requirements into the code of practice for architects and authorised persons," he said.

The government response is prepared on the basis of views expressed in an extensive consultation exercise conducted both within and outside the Government after the publication of the Consumer Council's report in March.

Members of the public who wish to obtain a copy of the response may write to the Economic Services Branch at second floor, Central Government Offices, Main Wing, Hong Kong, or OFTA, 22nd floor, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai. A copy is also placed on OFTA's home page at <http://www.ofta.gov.hk>.

End

HAD's role in building management disputes impartial

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The Home Affairs Department (HAD) must remain impartial when acting as mediator in handling complaints on building management from owners, the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Michael Suen, said today (Wednesday).

Speaking at the luncheon meeting of the Rotary Club of Kowloon West, Mr Suen said the Multi-storey Buildings (Owners Incorporation) Ordinance was enacted in 1970 to assist owners in setting up building management organisations.

It was amended in May 1993 and renamed Building Management Ordinance (BMO) in a bid to simplify the formation procedure of Owners' Corporations (OCs).

"Furthermore, the BMO has extended the jurisdiction of the Lands Tribunal to cover building management matters", he said.

"The HAD has also strengthened the support work in building management.

"To enrich the knowledge of owners in building management and to encourage them to form OCs, the department has been organising promotional activities and training courses including seminars and workshops.

"It has also produced educational videotapes and information pamphlets on how to achieve effective building management.

"HAD staff will also visit newly formed OCs to understand their work and, if needed, suggest solutions to problems that may arise. They will act as mediator when conflicts occur.

"The amendments in BMO have empowered owners to oversee the operation of OCs, while OCs are legal entities which will represent owners in carrying out building management duties. With their rights and duties stipulated in the law, owners are able to participate in the management of their own buildings," Mr Suen said.

As the owners were empowered to monitor OCs, Mr Suen stressed that HAD, when dealing with inquiries from owners, could only give advice on how to solve the problems instead of making a decision for the owners. This is to ensure that the rights and duties of the owners are respected.

"Therefore, when conflicts arise, HAD's staff are forbidden by law to judge the cases, nor could they take over the management committee upon complainants' requests because all these would only lead to an adverse impact on the impartiality of the department.

"Monitoring the Management Committee is OCs' duty which should not be taken over by the Government," he said.

"As the owners also have the right to monitor the work of the management committees, they can dissolve the committees when they are poorly-operated and terminate the contract with an inefficient management company."

Mr Suen also noted that owners' active participation in OCs through attending OC meetings and maintaining good communication with OCs is the best way to solve building management problems.

He said of the 1,000 inquiries received by the department each year, about half were complaint cases mainly triggered by disputes between owners and the management company or between owners and the OCs' management committees.

For example, some owners might suspect that someone was trying to take advantage from their management posts, or they had lost confidence in some members of the management committees because of lack of communication.

"However, from our experience, the cause of many complaints was not solely due to the faults of managing members. In most cases, complaints arose because of owners' insufficient knowledge in building management as well as a lack of participation in OC meetings," Mr Suen said.

Reiterating that the owners had the right to monitor OCs, Mr Suen assured that the building management problems could be solved and avoided if the owners could maintain good communication with OCs and be more committed to undertaking their duties in building management issues.

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Antiquity board delegation visit to Beijing

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A delegation of the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) had visited Beijing from September 3 to 7 to establish a closer relationship with related heritage preservation bodies in China and Hong Kong to facilitate future co-operation.

More importantly, the purpose of the trip is to bring to the institutes and authorities in China the fact that Hong Kong has a history of more than six thousand years instead of some 150 years as witnessed by the excavations carried out in the past few years.

The visit was considered very fruitful. It provided an opportunity for AAB and the professionals in mainland to exchange views on heritage preservation and archaeological studies.

The delegation was assured that heritage preservation works in Hong Kong will be carried out continuously by the future Special Administration government based on the Basic Law; that no other regional interference will be made to such works; and that support will be given to the future Hong Kong government when encountering difficulties in pursuing the works.

Special mention was also made to the importance of the works in educating people to understand the past of Hong Kong and its relation with China both historically and culturally.

The visit had succeeded in forging a closer relationship with the academic institutions in China dealing with archaeological studies and preservation of historical buildings.

They were given to understand the difficulties confronted with the heritage preservation work in Hong Kong, which included the high land value, the extraordinary pace of development, the lack of professionals in the field and the hot and humid climate.

With the launching of the two territory-wide surveys - one on historical buildings and structures and the other on archaeological sites - it was hoped that the professionals in China could give professional advice and guidance during the conduct of the surveys.

The professionals from the Tsinghua University also gave the delegation a briefing on traditional Chinese architecture and their preservation, and the heritage preservation policy in China.

Conclusively speaking, the visit, which was arranged by the State Bureau of Cultural Relics, was very fruitful in achieving the goals and opening up more contacts with the professionals in China apart from understanding more thoroughly the policy of the Chinese authorities towards heritage preservation in Hong Kong after 1997.

The delegation comprised the Chairman of AAB, Professor David Lung, three Committee Chairmen of the Board, namely Dr Michael Lau, Chairman of the Archaeological and Palaeontological Committee, Dr Elizabeth Sinn, Chairman of the Historical Buildings and Structures Committee and Ms Jane Cheng, Chairman of the Education and Publicity Committee.

The delegation was accompanied by the Principal Assistant Secretary, Mr Raymond Tam and representatives of the Antiquities and Monuments Office of the Broadcasting, Culture and Sport Branch.

During the visit, the delegation had called on the State Bureau of Cultural Relics, the Bureau of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Culture, the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council, the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, the Institute of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Palaeontology of Academia Sinica, the National Museum of Chinese History, the Palace Museum, the School of Architecture of Tsinghua University and the Department of Archaeology of the Beijing University.

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Recommendation to declare five lighthouses as monuments

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At its meeting held yesterday (Tuesday), the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) recommended that the Nam Koo Terrace be declared as historical building and five lighthouses as monuments under the Antiquities and Monument Ordinance. The five lighthouses are:

- (i) Cape D'Aguiar Lighthouse on Hong Kong Island
- (ii) Old Green Island Lighthouse on Green Island
- (iii) New Green Island Lighthouse on Green Island
- (iv) Kap Sing Lighthouse on Tang Lung Chau
- (v) Waglan Island Lighthouse on Waglan Island

The Board also endorsed the proposal to organise the "Year of Heritage" in 1997 to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of AAB and the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO).

A series of activities have been proposed to be launched in 1997 to publicise the achievements of AAB and AMO in preserving the heritage of Hong Kong over the past decades, and to raise the profile of heritage preservation to a new height. The Board further agreed to form a steering group to implement the proposed programmes.

Representatives of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) were invited to brief the Board on the Western Corridor Railway project.

Members expressed grave concern over the possible impact of the project on the historical and archaeological items along the future alignment. The Board urged KCRC to consult the Board and AMO fully on the Environmental Impact Assessment Study to be conducted soon.

The Board was briefed by representatives of the Planning Department and consulted on the Town Planning White Bill and the Territorial Development Strategy Review. The policy statement issued by the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands in June entitled "Urban Renewal in Hong Kong" was also discussed.

The Board expressed serious concern over the lack of proper regard in these proposals to the need to ensure heritage protection when devising developmental plans in Hong Kong.

Members reiterated the paramount importance of protecting the "cultural environment" of Hong Kong. The Board further urged that the future Urban Renewal Authority should have a mechanism to look after and protect the historical buildings in the urban area.

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Improvements to social centres for the elderly

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Several improvements to social centres for the elderly have been implemented since the publication of the report of the working group on care for the elderly in August 1994.

This was stated by the Director of Social Welfare, Mr Ian Strachan, when he officiated at the opening ceremony of the Sik Sik Yuen Ho Wong Social Centre for Senior Citizens in Mong Kok today (Wednesday).

Mr Strachan said these improvements included the upward revision of the planning ratio to one centre for every 2,000 elderly population, improvements in staffing to provide better clerical support and adoption of open membership to enable more of the senior citizens to enjoy the facilities and services of the social centres.

"A range of community support services, such as social centres for the elderly, play an important role in enabling our senior citizens to live happily and in dignity as full participating members of the our society as long as possible," he said.

Mr Strachan said in view of the growing ageing population, the government had, in 1992, pledged to provide 70 more social centres for the elderly by the end of 1997.

"However, we have faced great difficulties in identifying suitable premises for setting up a sufficient number of these centres, especially in old urban areas without public housing estates.

"Fortunately, through a purchase programme jointly undertaken by the Architectural Services Department, Government Property Agency and Social Welfare Department, we have identified 28 sets of private premises in various parts of the territory for setting up social centres for the elderly to make up the shortfall," Mr Strachan said.

He said the Government had now purchased and fitted out six centres in Yau Tsim/Mong Kok District alone and the centre opened today was one of them.

Founded in 1921, Sik Sik Yuen is a well-established non-profit-making charitable organisation providing various services for the sick, the poor, the young and the elderly.

With regards to services for the elderly, it has five residential homes, nine social centres and one multi-service centre.

End

Keen support for World Bank/International Monetary Fund meetings

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The 1997 World Bank Group/International Monetary Fund annual meetings which will be held in Hong Kong next year has received enthusiastic support from the private sector.

Sponsorships resulting in a savings of more than \$70 million have been received so far, with some \$40 million in cash and the rest in kind.

At a cheque presentation ceremony to acknowledge the cash sponsors held today (Wednesday), the Financial Secretary, Mr Donald Tsang said: "This is one of the most important events to be held in Hong Kong after the change in sovereignty."

He also said by sponsoring the event, the private sector had demonstrated strong commitment to the future of Hong Kong.

A total of 19 sponsors, from the banking, property and trading sectors, were present in today's ceremony.

End

1997 commemorative gold coin to be issued

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A limited quantity of commemorative gold coins will be issued in July next year to mark the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 1997.

This continues a tradition of marking significant events in Hong Kong with the issue of a precious metal coin.

The 1997 commemorative gold coin will bear the standard Bauhinia design on the obverse side, with a special commemorative design of Hong Kong skyline on the reverse side.

It will have face value of \$1,000 and will be in 22 carat gold. It is legal tender and will be issued by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority on behalf of the Government and for the account of Exchange Fund.

The coin is not anticipated to be circulated generally or used by the public for payment in transactions, but by making it a legal tender adds appreciably to its attractiveness and value in the eyes of the collectors.

A limited number of pieces will be minted by the Royal Canadian Mint with the bulk to be available for sales in Hong Kong.

Each coin will carry a certificate and will be individually numbered.

After covering the cost of issue, profits generated from the sale will be held in a suspense account of the general revenue and will be used to fund selected projects for the benefit of the community.

The coin will be sold in Hong Kong by inviting public application and, if necessary, by ballot, in late May or early June next year. The date of issue is July 1, 1997. The coin will be made available to international collectors by agents.

End

Royal Marines to take up charity challenge

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Crack troops from HMS Tamar will take part in one of their most difficult exercises this weekend between September 20 and 23.

Leaving behind the world of anti-smuggling operations, and armed only with dusters, brushes and many willing hands, 10 Royal Marines from 45 Commando, based in Arbroath, Scotland, will take on any domestic challenge Hong Kong can throw up - all for only \$100 per hour in aid of the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children and the Baby Joshua Fund.

The success of "Rent-A-Royal" earlier in the year prompted the current detachment to take up the challenge once again and they hope their fund-raising activities will exceed the previous total of \$35,000.

No job is too big or too small for the Royal Marines. From spring cleaning apartments, delivering furniture, helping with the shopping or walking the dog, these elite troops will tackle any task put to them. Already bids have come in to clean kitchens and to serve up a gourmet breakfast for 10 people in Mid-levels.

The Commando are looking to the local community to help raise funds for these two deserving charities and are standing by their phones to take bids for their services. Anyone willing to "Rent-A-Royal" should contact Sergeant Dave Barback on 2746 0789.

End

Monitors' report submitted to CS

The monitors appointed to observe the Tai A Chau Detention Centre decantation operation this (Wednesday) morning have submitted their report to the Chief Secretary.

The four monitors comprised two non-official Justices of the Peace, Mr Liu Ching-leung and Dr Stan Cheng Tsang-kay; and representatives from two non-government organisations, Ms Gilla Nemayechi from Medecins Sans Frontieres and Mr Neil Papenfus from Oxfam.

End

Fresh water cut in Yau Tong

The fresh water supply to some premises in Yau Tong will be temporarily suspended from 11 pm on Saturday (September 21) to 6 am the following day for waste detection work on watermains.

The suspension will affect all premises along Cha Kwo Ling Road between Ko Fai Road and No 428 Cha Kwo Ling Road.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	<u>\$ million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	2,039	0930	+121
Closing balance in the account	2,162	1000	+121
Change attributable to:		1100	+121
Money market activity	+123	1200	+123
LAF today	Nil	1500	+123
		1600	+123

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 124.6 *+0.1* 18.9.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes/MTRC				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	5.00	2 years	2808	6.00	99.60	6.32
1 month	5.01	3 years	3907	6.80	100.51	6.70
3 months	5.20	5 years	5106	7.32	100.45	7.34
6 months	5.33	7 years	7308	7.24	98.51	7.66
12 months	5.70	5 years	M503	7.35	99.35	7.65

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$19,311 million

Closed September 18, 1996

End