



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Friday, September 15, 1972

CHONG HING MANSION REPORT MADE PUBLIC

The report of the Committee of Inquiry into the closure of Chong Hing Mansion was made public today.

The first part of the report deals with the question of whether any further assistance should be given by the Government to those affected, in addition to the offer of resettlement.

In a summary of its findings on this first term of reference, the Committee expressed the opinion that the public officers concerned at the time of occupation acted "inadvisedly". The Committee felt therefore that there was a "moral justification for helping those tenants to whose loss the Government's action contributed".

It went on to say that the Government had already met this in part by offering resettlement to domestic tenants.

However, the Committee felt that there was also moral justification for additional help to those carrying on businesses in shops, staircase shops, workshops or commercial undertakings if no further payments were made by the Liu Chong Hing Bank Limited.

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Here the Committee again stressed that it regarded the company as "primarily responsible for the whole situation". The Committee said, however, that the present Board of Directors of the Liu Chong Hing Bank had shown a fair degree of responsibility since the date on which the Chong Hing Mansion was declared dangerous. It also pointed out that the criticism of the bank only applied to the former management.

Commenting on the first part of the report a Government spokesman said today that the principal owners of the building had already made ex-gratia payments and assisted tenants and small shop owners of the building, and this assistance had been accepted by all concerned.

The bank had also helped a number of non-domestic tenants with additional payments, credit facilities, loans at low interest rates or alternative accommodation.

The spokesman said that in view of this it had been decided that no further Government assistance was necessary.

Conclusions

In the second part of the report, the Committee reached three main conclusions:-

- a. that the provisions of the Buildings Ordinance are adequate to ensure that a building is not occupied until an occupation permit has been issued. However, it found that the value of the permits in indicating that the building was safe largely depended on the reliance to be placed on the certificates of authorised architects and registered contractors "as to which we (the Committee) have strong doubts".

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b. The administrative procedures and methods of inspection by the Public Works Department are adequate to ensure that the provisions of the Buildings Ordinance relating to the obtaining of occupation permits are properly enforced.

c. Because of a shortage of staff the procedures and methods are not adequate to cope with unauthorised changes of use after the issue of an occupation permit.

In the light of this, the Committee recommended that consideration be given to devising means of improving the reliability of certificates signed by authorised architects and registered contractors.

It also said that a Control and Enforcement Section of the Buildings Ordinance Office should be established and a programme of inspections devised so that unauthorised changes of use after the issue of an occupation permit could be detected and dealt with at an early stage.

Legislation

The Government spokesman, commenting on the second part of the report, said that these recommendations had been accepted and "legislation is now being prepared which will enable the Building Authority to order a person responsible for carrying out dangerous or potentially dangerous building works to remedy the situation.

"If the order is not complied with, the Building Authority will be able to remedy the situation and recover the cost from the developer.

"Steps are also being taken to raise substantially the penalties for certain serious offences, including the use of defective materials and deviation from approved plans. It is also proposed to consider the introduction of penalties for continuing offences under the Ordinance."

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The control and enforcement effort which would be necessary to prevent all unauthorised changes of use after the issue of an occupation permit would be very substantial. But the spokesman said that consideration was already being given to ways in which the Buildings Ordinance Office could best provide this.

Chong Hing Mansion, comprising 10 post-war houses, was ordered closed in May 1971 because the building was in an advanced state of deterioration and in danger of collapse.

The Committee was set up on March 17, 1971 under the chairmanship of District Judge, Mr. P.F.X. Leonard. Its members were:

Mr. Lam Chik-ho, Building Contractor

Mr. Jon A. Prescott, Architect

Mr. N.M. Gleeson, Assistant Registrar General (Land Office)

Mr. P.B. Williams, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs.

The report of the Committee into the first term of reference was made in May, 1971 and on the remaining matters in October 1971. Since this time, the matters raised in the report have had to be given detailed and thorough consideration by all departments concerned.

Building Inspections

Meanwhile, another aspect of the work of the Buildings Ordinance Office - the inspection of buildings during their construction - is to be improved.

Approval in principle has been given by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council to expand the inspection staff so that more frequent and systematic inspections of buildings under construction are made, as a check that they are being erected in accordance with approved plans.

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The Government spokesman emphasised that it has always been the responsibility of the authorised architect and registered contractor to ensure that a building is being constructed safely and in accordance with the approved plans.

He said the expansion of the Buildings Ordinance Office staff would help to ensure that they were carrying out their duties and responsibilities properly, but it did not mean that the B.O.O. was usurping the functions of the architect or assuming his responsibilities.

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FINAL PHASE OF WORK ON NEW LOW COST HOUSING ESTATE

The Ko Chiu Road Government Low Cost Housing Estate at Yau Tong Bay, which contains some 4,000 low rent flats in 11 domestic blocks, is now nearing the end of its development.

On completion, it will have all the amenities of a small township, with 13 children's play areas, mini parks, market facilities, clinics, restaurants, shops and a bus terminus.

The final phase of work involves the construction of roads, car parks, and recreation areas, ground surfacing, and drainage work.

A bus terminus, to be paved with concrete, will also be built. It requires prior site clearance and the building of a retaining wall.

The work is estimated to cost almost \$1 million and is expected to begin in November this year for completion six months later.

In addition, remedial work will be carried out on an embankment near blocks 9 and 10 which was damaged in the June rainstorms. It will include repairs to the broken surface water channels.

The work is to be finished about January next year.

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PART CLOSURE OF CENTRAL CAR PARK

A section of the Murray Road temporary open-air car park in Central District is to be closed with effect from midnight on September 28.

The Transport Department announced today that the closure involves 168 parking spaces in the north-west corner of the car park which is bounded by Harcourt Road, Murray Road, Queensway and Cotton Tree Drive.

The land was bought at auction late last year by Hutchison International Limited and it is now required for the development of a 24-storey office block. The project, costing about \$60 million, will incorporate shopping arcades and display centres.

The loss of 168 parking spaces is more than compensated for by the provision of 500 spaces in the new ex-Naval Dockyard car park just across the road.

Another 900 spaces will be available when the Murray Road multi-storey car park is opened next year.

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GOVERNOR RECEIVES DECLARATION OF REHABILITATION INTERNATIONAL

The Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose today received a scroll containing the Declaration of the Rehabilitation International from Mr. John Broinowski, President of the 1972 World Rehabilitation Congress.

The scroll was handed over to Sir Murray at a simple ceremony at Government House.

Mr. Broinowski, is in Hong Kong on an official visit. Also present at the ceremony were Dr. Harry Fang, Executive Vice-President of Rehabilitation International, Mr. David Lo, the National Secretary of Rehabilitation International, Hong Kong, Mrs. Mary Wong, Chairman of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, Mr. L.B. MacQuarrie, Director of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, and Mr. P.B. Williams, Principal Assistant Colonial Secretary (Social Services).

Rehabilitation International, which has just ended its 1972 World Congress in Sydney, has declared the 1970s as the Decade of Rehabilitation.

The declaration urges all nations to guarantee the rights of the disabled.

The scroll presented to the Governor says in part: "It is our hope and plea that, during this decade and forever after, there will be in every nation reasonable assurance that the rights of the disabled are protected and that each has a fair opportunity to realize his aspirations."

Hong Kong is an affiliated member of the organisation and is represented by the Rehabilitation Division of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

New ideas and concepts in rehabilitation as well as details of research in this field are regularly exchanged between members.

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After receiving the scroll the Governor said: "It gives me very much pleasure to accept this Declaration of the Decade of Rehabilitation. It is a symbol of the deep concern that exists in the world for disabled people.

"We in Hong Kong share this concern.

"In this field we have very substantial problems. We already have extensive medical and educational facilities for the physically handicapped and mentally retarded, and other schemes including priority for housing and assistance and counselling for social adjustment - to name a few.

"But our services are still insufficient to cater for all those in Hong Kong who need them, and we are addressing ourselves to the problem of an adequate expansion programme. In this programme the Government and the voluntary agencies will both have major parts to play.

"I am grateful for your visit which will be an encouragement to all working in this important field."

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NEW GARDENS FOR HONG KONG

Two new rest gardens - one covering about 78,000 square feet - are to be provided by the Government on both sides of the harbour.

The larger one will be built to the north of the Wang Tau Hom Resettlement Estate. Much of the site will be reserved for turfing and the planting of flower beds while park benches and footpaths will also be provided.

On Hong Kong Island, a new rest garden covering about 4,500 square feet and including a sitting-out area is to be built at Chung Hom Kok next to the Cheshire Home.

At the same time extra barbecue pits will be added to the existing facilities at the Old Gun Post on the southern tip of Chung Hom Kok.

The Wang Tau Hom project will begin at the end of October and is expected to be finished within four months, while that at Chung Hom Kok should start around November and be ready by next February.

In the mean time, the largest skating rink ever built by the Urban Council is now open to the public. It is in the Kowloon Tsai Park.

The rink was built at a cost of \$120,000 and occupies an area of 9,000 square feet.

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TENDERS FOR RESETTLEMENT SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS

The Government is again inviting tenders for the renting of some 23 resettlement shops and seven restaurants in estates situated on Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories.

Tenancies will be for a term of three years in the case of shops and four years for restaurants. The tenancies are renewable subject to re-negotiation and rental re-assessment.

Although part of the specified shop premises may be used for domestic purposes, there can be no sub-letting.

Each of the shops to be let has been designated for a particular trade to provide a balanced shopping centre for the estates.

Successful tenderers will not be allowed, under normal circumstances, to change their trades and in case of a breach of lease conditions, the lease will be terminated.

A Resettlement Department spokesman said today that anyone who is over 21 years can tender for these shops and restaurants, but the final decision will rest with the Central Tender Board.

Deposits of \$500 for shop premises or \$2,000 for restaurant premises tendered will be required as a pledge of the bona fides of the tenderer, but will be refunded if it is unsuccessful.

Anyone who wants further details may call personally at the Resettlement Department at 692, Prince Edward Road, San Po Kong Government Offices, 4th floor, Kowloon.

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QUARANTINE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED

The Port Health Authority has imposed quarantine restrictions on arrivals from three ports in Indonesia - Pakanbaru, Bana-Atjeh and Tjilatjap - because of cholera.

Similar restrictions have been imposed on arrivals from Nhatrang (port and airport) in South Vietnam because of both plague and cholera.

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Release Time: 7.00 p.m.