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<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
Transcript of Governor's media session	1
Measures to address urban renewal problems	4
Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill	5
Slope maintenance works of schools closely monitored	6
Bill to improve quality of childminding services	8
Bus drivers soon be required to wear seat belts	9
Applications for BN(O) passports and CIs by post	10
Survey of cantilever scaffolds completed	11
Public views quality school education invited	12
Consultation pamphlet on quality school education welcomed	14
CS completes Los Angeles leg of US promotional tour	14
Steady recovery of economic growth in HK forecast	16
Cargo vessel commissioned for CSD	18

/Good partnership

Contents

Page No.

Good partnership enhances building safety	19
New appointees to civic education committee	20
Temporary suspension of ED's enquiry system	21
The weather of May	21
Two NT lots to let	23
Advanced welfare payment for public holidays	24
Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations	25

Transcript of Governor's media session

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Following is the transcript of the media session by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, after visiting Tseung Kwan O this (Wednesday) afternoon:

Governor: Good afternoon. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity in Tseung Kwan O this afternoon of seeing some of the progress that the Housing Authority has been making in carrying out both its performance pledges and its policy pledges.

I was particularly interested to see two things. First of all, the work which is being done to improve the management of estates and to make absolutely certain that tenants get as fast a service as possible when it comes to maintenance, to dealing with some of the problems that prop up even in the best-run block of flats. Secondly, I was pleased to see what is being done to deal with the problems of housing our senior citizens. They have particular needs. It requires as much flexibility as possible in managing the existing housing stock and in building new houses and flats. So I was very pleased to see what the Housing Authority has been doing as well in order to keep the pledges that we've made about improved housing for senior citizens and increased housing for senior citizens.

Question: Mr Patten. A lot of people are arguing that the provisional legislature is

Governor: I'd say very much what the British Foreign Secretary has said in the past, what I've said in the past, what the Chief Secretary and others have said in the past and continue to say. In our judgement, to quote from the Foreign Secretary, the establishment of a provisional legislature, the dismantling of the existing legislature, would be reprehensible and unjustifiable. What is the purpose of doing it. The purpose we all know is to exclude some people from the Legislative Council that some Chinese officials don't like. That's hardly going to lead to a fairly elected or representative legislature. So as far as we are concerned, there is one fairly elected legislature in Hong Kong. I've been pleased that some senior Chinese officials including in meetings, the Premier and the Vice-Premier have both made it absolutely clear that they understand there is only one Legislative Council before the 30th of June 1997, and if they seek to dismantle that legislature on the 30th of June 1997 or rather on the 1st of July they'll have to explain how, what they're doing is in line with the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law if they can. Until the 30th of June 1997 we intend to do absolutely nothing at all which could conceivably undermine the authority and the status of the Legislative Council. Now I've been saying that for some months. The British Government has been saying that for some months. Other members of the Hong Kong Government have been saying that for some months. That's our policy. It has been our policy. It's our policy today. It will be our policy till the 30th of June 1997. Full stop.

Question: There's only one year left What is the top agenda in your mind to make sure there is smooth transition ...?

Governor: I'm of course concerned that there should be a smooth transition, but I'm even more concerned about what sort of Hong Kong makes that transition. I want Hong Kong to continue as successfully economically as it's been over the years and I want Hong Kong to remain a free society living under the rule of law. And I'll continue to have as my main priorities ensuring that those things happen.

Question: You've said that the provisional legislature is unjustified, the setting up of such a body. But will the Hong Kong Government give a hand to help the setting up of such a body ...?

Governor: How many times do I have to answer with respect the same question. I've made it clear again and again and again, and I'll make it clear again this afternoon that we will do absolutely nothing whatsoever to compromise the authority of the Legislative Council or to assist in its dismantling and there can be no other Legislative Council as far as we are concerned, none whatsoever, before the 30th of June 1997. Now I can't make it much plainer than that.

Question: Is there anything ... be changed ...?

Governor: No. No. Is that ... a negative no rather than a no with a question mark or a positive no or an affirmative no. How ... no no, a no no no?

Question: In a radio interview this week, T S Lo said ...

Governor: Well, among the many things that I am not responsible for, I include among those things the weather, the performance of the English football team, another of them are the comments of Mr T S Lo which I think speak for themselves.

Question: How about Director Lu Ping, Governor, do you think that he is inferring on you ...?

Governor: Did he what?

Question: Inferring on you, Mr Lu Ping yesterday's remark ...?

Governor: Well, I wouldn't have thought that it was a very sensible way of, if that's what he was saying, of describing my attempt which will continue until June 30, 1997 to stand up for Hong Kong. But let me say something which relates to his remark sent to those for which I take no credit, made by a distinguished former member of the Executive Council who is now the possessor of a Chinese passport. Let me just say a word or two about that issue. We have today in Hong Kong, we have today freedom of speech. We have freedom of speech which is guaranteed in our laws. We're told that there will be freedom of speech after 1997 as well. And that too is guaranteed in the Joint Declaration and in the Basic Law. Today, newspapers report, and they sometimes advocate, I'm sure it's the case that in leading articles Ta Kung Pao and Wen Wei Po sometimes advocate as well as reporting. We make no distinction between advocacy and reporting, how can you? So I am puzzled by the suggestion that somehow there will be laws after 1997 which will make that distinction. I am also puzzled about something else. Basic Law article 23 makes it perfectly clear that the laws on these issues will be made by the SAR Government and legislature. So I don't quite understand what is the basis for some Chinese officials saying what those laws will do or be. It's entirely a matter for the SAR Government. So I very much hope that we won't have any more confusion about this issue. There is freedom of speech today and it is promised tomorrow. And we don't make the sort of distinction which I mentioned earlier.

Question: Governor, do you think that Lu Ping is a good salesman for Hong Kong ...?

Governor: I think it is a very good thing that Lu Ping and other senior Chinese officials go to other countries in the region and elsewhere and explain both what the Joint Declaration says, what the Basic Law says, what it means to talk about Hong Kong having a high degree of autonomy and what their plans are for the future. I would hope that in making those statements, they could avoid occasional confusion, for example over issues like freedom of speech but as I've said before, I welcome without any reservation whatsoever, senior Chinese officials taking the word about Hong Kong's present success and the pledges they've made for the future to other countries, whether in the region or in Europe or in North America.

Question: ... because you are advocating ...

Governor: Sorry?

Question: Because you are one of the ... you have advocacy...?

Governor: I am advocating adherence to the Joint Declaration. I assume that that is not something which Director Lu would think was wrong after 1997. I find this whole issue profoundly puzzling. But as I've said to you before, I haven't tied this knot and it is for others who have tied it to undo it. Thank you very much indeed.

End

Measures to address urban renewal problems

* * * * *

The Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen Leung, today (Wednesday) announced a package of measures to address urban renewal problems immediately and longer term proposals to speed up and widen the scope of urban redevelopment.

The immediate measures are:

- * Housing Society will act as rehousing agent for the Land Development Corporation (LDC) to improve the standard and range of rehousing to those affected by urban renewal. This will enable LDC to concentrate on the planning, site assembly and implementation aspects of projects.
- * Three sites will be granted to Housing Society at 1/3 of the full market value for the construction of about 2,000 additional flats for rehousing purposes to support the currently planned LDC projects.
- * The Housing Authority will be requested to extend from six to 12 months, the priority in allocation of public housing for affected households.
- * The Government will grant land to LDC to implement a linked-site scheme where profit obtained in developing Government land will be used to cross-subsidise financially non-viable projects to improve the living environment.
- * The Planning, Environment and Lands Branch is to set up a dedicated urban renewal team to strengthen co-ordination among concerned parties and to oversee and monitor the implementation of the new urban renewal policy and projects.

In addition, LDC will continue to make offers above existing market value in property acquisition and to keep open the options of "flat-for-flat" exchange and "owners participation".

In the longer term, Mr Leung said: "We will consider upgrading the LDC to a statutory Urban Renewal Authority, and measures to encourage proper building maintenance through the creation of a Rehabilitation Fund and to facilitate private land owners to redevelop their properties.

"These long-term proposals aim at more fundamental changes to the existing urban renewal policy. Given the considerable policy and resource implications, we will consider them in depth before deciding the way forward.

"The package was worked out after we had carefully considered views expressed during a consultation exercise from July 20 to November 15, 1995.

"It will help us deal with the growing urban decay problem caused by the ageing of private buildings. It is estimated that the number of obsolescent private buildings over 30 years old will be more than double from the present stock of 113,000 units to 260,000 units in 10 years.

"The package, which has been approved by the Governor-in-Council, will enable us to take the urban renewal process forward into the next century towards the goal of improving people's quality of life."

Copies of the urban renewal document will be available from District Offices starting tomorrow.

End

Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

* * * * *

The Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 1996 will be gazetted on Friday (June 14) and is expected to be introduced into the Legislative Council on June 26, a government spokesman said today (Wednesday).

The Bill amends the Supreme Court Ordinance to enable solicitors to be appointed as recorders and to give the Chief Justice the power to appoint temporary deputy registrars and temporary assistant registrars.

It also amends the Jury Ordinance to abolish the requirement that the Registrar of the Supreme Court must state to the court or the judge his reasons for excusing a person from attending on a jury.

The spokesman said: "The Bill proposes to repeal the Secretary of State for Defence (Succession to Property) Ordinance, the Air Armament Practice Ordinance, the Defence Works Protection Ordinance, the Compulsory Service Ordinance and the China Fleet Club Incorporation Ordinance.

"These Ordinances are either obsolete or have been in disuse for many years."

The spokesman said the Bill contained other miscellaneous amendments.

"These include updating the list of practice firing ranges in the Defence (Firing Areas) Ordinance and amending the Protected Places (Safety) Ordinance to bring it into line with the internal orders of the British forces and the Police," he said.

End

Slope maintenance works of schools closely monitored

* * * * *

The Government is closely monitoring the progress of slope maintenance works of 19 schools which have potentially dangerous slopes within or in the vicinity of their boundaries, the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph W P Wong, said today (Wednesday).

Fourteen of the schools have been served with the Dangerous Hillside Orders issued under the Building Ordinance and the other five have been or are being affected by substandard public slopes upgraded/being upgraded under the Landslip Preventive Measures Programme.

Mr Wong said remedial works in respect of four schools had been completed.

He said letters had been issued by the Director of Education to all the affected schools advising them to make precautionary arrangements and to keep parents informed of the arrangements as appropriate.

Referring to concerns about compensation under the block insurance policy for aided schools in the event of a landslip accident, Mr Wong said the maximum insured sum in respect of public liability was \$7.5 million for any one occurrence.

"The public liability insurance covers the insured school's legal liability for damages in respect of bodily injury to students and other persons (other than employees of the insured school), and loss of or damage to property.

"In addition, the block insurance policy contains a group personal accident insurance specifically for students which covers accidental death and disablement benefit to each student provided that such accident occurs while the student is participating in any school activities.

"The maximum sum insured is \$20,000 each student for each and every loss," Mr Wong said.

The Government was currently reviewing the terms of the block insurance policy, he added.

Meanwhile, the Education Department today organised an experience sharing session for the school principals of the affected schools.

At the session, the principals of 16 schools affected by sub-standard slopes discussed their concerns with representatives from the Geotechnical Engineering Office, Buildings Department and Architectural Services Department.

The officers from the three works departments reminded the school heads about the government enquiry hotlines and contact telephone numbers in case of emergency.

It was pointed out that schools may approach relevant departments for professional advice in relation to slope safety in the event of inclement weather.

School heads were also assured that professionals or consultants appointed by the schools would keep them closely informed of the necessary precautionary measures and the progress of remedial works.

A school head shared his experience in devising a contingency plan. The participants were confident that they would also be able to devise a contingency plan that suits their own circumstances. The approach of the sample contingency plan is similar to that for fire drills in school.

They also noted that the recent letter issued by the Education Department was useful in helping them to prepare a contingency plan in accordance with their own situation, particularly after this experience sharing session.

Representatives of the five schools which are affected by government slopes being upgraded under the Landslip Preventive Measures Programme also noted at the meeting that works on the slopes were either completed or being carried out.

The schools are Cognitio College, Man Kiu Association Primary School, Hong Kong Taoist Association School, FDBWA Yan Kow School and SKH St John's Primary School.

The Assistant Director of Education (Schools), Mr Kwan Shu-tsun, said the experience sharing was very useful.

"Principals of concerned schools are advised to contact the District Education Offices or works departments should they have any enquiries in connection with slope safety.

"The Education Department is well aware of their concerns and will render support in conjunction with other government departments, whenever possible," he said.

End

Bill to improve quality of childminding services

* * * * *

A Bill which seeks to prohibit unsuitable persons from acting as childminders and to improve the quality of care for children in child care centres will be published in the Gazette on Friday (June 14).

Entitled the Child Care Centres (Amendment) Bill 1996, it also proposes to exempt mutual help child care centres from certain controls under the Child Care Centres Ordinance.

Commenting on the proposed amendments, a spokesman for the Health and Welfare Branch said today (Wednesday) that at present, there was no control over childminding activities where care was provided to fewer than six young children under the age of six.

In recent years, incidents have occurred in which babies and young children have suffered serious neglect or physical abuses from their childminders.

A full registration system for childminders would be very cumbersome to administer and, if made compulsory, would greatly reduce the number of people willing to offer such services.

"Being left unattended is a much greater and more common risk for babies and young children than being abused by a childminder.

"After careful deliberation, we concluded that the most appropriate form of control would be to prohibit unsuitable persons from acting as childminders," the spokesman said.

Under the Bill, a person would be prohibited from acting as a childminder if he or she has been convicted of any specified serious offences which would pose a risk of exposing the child being minded to abuse.

The Director of Social Welfare (DSW) will also be empowered to determine a person to be unsuitable to act as a childminder on the basis of the findings of a coroner's inquiry concerning the death of a child while in his or her care as a childminder.

However, the Bill allows the person concerned to make written representations to DSW and be given a right of an appeal against DSW's determination to the Administrative Appeals Board.

A childminder may also request DSW to issue a certificate verifying that he or she is not prohibited from childminding. Parents can ask a potential childminder to show them the certificate to assist them to assess his/her suitability to look after their child.

The Bill further proposes to exempt mutual help child care centres from the full set of requirements under the Ordinance.

"By making it easier for mutual help child care centres to operate, we aim to facilitate their formation and operation since they play a key role in addressing the problem of children left unattended at home," the spokesman said.

There are also a number of technical amendments aimed at improving the quality of care provided for children in child care centres.

The Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services have expressed support for the proposed amendments.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on June 26.

End

Bus drivers soon be required to wear seat belts

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The Government is to impose compulsory requirements for buses to be fitted with safety belts on the driver's seats and bus drivers to wear them.

An amendment regulation stipulating the requirements will be gazetted on Friday (June 14) and will come into operation from July 1, 1997.

A government spokesman said today (Wednesday) that existing regulations required the compulsory fitting and wearing of seat belts for drivers and front seat passengers of private cars, taxis, light buses and goods vehicles.

"Since June 1 this year the requirement has been extended to the middle front seats of such vehicles as well as all rear seats of private cars," he said.

"From a road safety view point, it is necessary to protect our bus drivers, and hence the public, by imposing similar compulsory requirements."

He said bus companies were given one year to order new buses with approved seat belts.

"For buses registered before the amendment Regulation comes into operation, bus owners will be given a five-year grace period to retro-fit seat belts," he said.

"Exemptions from the Commissioner for Transport may be given to those models of buses which have technical problems in fitting seat belts," he added.

End

Applications for BN(O) passports and CIs by post

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The Government today (Wednesday) announced that from Friday (June 14), children under 11 years of age, the aged, the blind and the infirm who are eligible for British National (Overseas) passports or Certificates of Identity (CI) may apply by post along with their applications for permanent identity cards without having to attend in person.

A government spokesman explained that at present, an applicant who was aged, blind or infirm, and who satisfied a registration officer that compliance with the Registration of Persons Ordinance and regulations would injure his health or the health of others, and children under 11 were exempted from the requirement to register or apply for a Hong Kong identity card.

"But if these people are eligible for and wish to apply for a BN(O) passport or a CI, they will have to first apply for a permanent identity card," he said.

"As an applicant for a permanent identity card is required under the existing law to submit the application in person, these exempt persons are unable to apply for the BN(O) passport or the CI by post like other applicants who are already holding permanent identity cards."

The spokesman said the Registration of Persons Regulations would be amended to enable registration officers to waive the personal attendance requirement for these applicants who satisfied the necessary conditions.

"The changes are aimed at improving services to the public. Particularly with the summer holidays approaching, we believe that a considerable number of people among the affected groups especially children can be benefited," he said.

For enquiries, members of the public may telephone the Immigration Department hotline 2824 6111 or use the faxline 2877 7711.

End

Survey of cantilever scaffolds completed

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The Labour Department's Occupational Safety and Health Branch (OSHB) has completed a check on cantilever scaffolds being used in constructing bridges and flyovers in the territory.

Factory inspectors involved in the three-day operation found a total of 143 cantilever scaffolds in use on 14 work sites.

"Valid reports of monthly inspection (Form 6) of these scaffolds, properly certified by competent persons, were also available for inspection by factory inspectors," Deputy Commissioner for Labour in charge of the OSHB, Mr Lee Kai-fat, said today (Wednesday).

"No irregularities in the operation of the scaffolds have been discovered," Mr Lee added.

The territory-wide inspections were launched after five workers and an engineer died as a result of the collapse of a cantilever scaffold in a Kwai Chung construction site last Thursday (June 6) evening.

He stressed that building contractors should observe relevant regulations under the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance to ensure workers' safety.

Mr Lee said the safe use of cantilever scaffolds is being governed by the following industrial safety regulations:

- (a) Regulation 38F of the Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations - that the cantilever scaffold should be adequately supported, fixed or anchored;
- (b) Regulation 38G of the Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations - that the structure used as support of the scaffold shall be of sound material and sufficient strength;
- (c) Regulation 38K of the Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations - the scaffold shall be inspected by a competent person at monthly intervals who should certify that it is in safe working condition in an approved form (Form 6); and
- (d) Section 6A (General Duties Provisions) of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance - that a contractor is required to provide a safe system of work.

The maximum fine is \$200,000 for a breach against each of these four provisions and an additional penalty of imprisonment of 12 months in respect of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance.

Meanwhile, a team of factory inspectors and engineers led by a Deputy Chief Factory Inspector, is still investigating last week's fatal cantilever scaffold accident in Kwai Chung.

"We hope to complete our investigation by mid-July. While investigation is continuing, it is not appropriate to speculate on the causes of the accident," Mr Lee said.

End

Public views quality school education invited

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The Chairman of the Education Commission, Professor Rosie Young, called on members of the public to forward their views during a six-week consultation which started today (Wednesday) on how to ensure quality school education.

Speaking at a press conference to launch the consultation exercise, Professor Young said public views on this important issue would be useful to the Commission in drafting its No 7 report, which would be released for extensive consultation this Autumn.

"The public consultation will help ensure that the Commission's No 7 report contains concrete proposals which would address the genuine needs of the school community and the concerns of the public at large.

"To facilitate the public in considering the issue, a consultation pamphlet was produced by the Commission's task group on school quality and school funding," Professor Young said.

The pamphlet describes briefly the present school system, the roles of the key players in the system and the present funding arrangements.

It also identifies the main constraints of the system including the lack of flexibility and accountability in the funding and school management systems, the lack of appropriate indicators to assess the performance of schools, school sponsoring bodies, school management committees, principals and teachers, and the absence of incentives for schools to take initiatives and accept responsibility for the achievement of quality education.

The pamphlet proposes a new quality culture with clear goals and incentives for improvement, and invites views on:

- * goals and targets of quality school education;
- * ways to relate school funding to performance; and
- * the roles of key players in the school system and the relationships between them.

Interested parties are welcome to send in their views by July 31 to Education Commission Secretariat, ninth floor, Central Government Offices (West Wing), 11 Ice House Street, Central (Fax 2537 4591).

Copies of the pamphlet can be obtained from all district offices and the sub-offices of the Education Department. It is also available at the following E-mail address: embinfo@emb.gcn.gov.hk.

End

Consultation pamphlet on quality school education welcomed

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The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph W P Wong, today (Wednesday) welcomed the publication of a consultation pamphlet on quality school education by the Education Commission.

"It is important to ensure that our school system can deliver the quality of education required to develop the full potential of students, sustain Hong Kong's social and economic growth and to meet the aspiration of our community.

"In this connection, the Administration supports the Commission's efforts in consulting the public on ways to improve the quality of our school education," Mr Wong said.

Referring to the Commission's first of a two-round consultation on how to build a quality culture in schools with clear goals and incentives for improvement, Mr Wong said it was important that the community, particularly the education sector, should give their views which will form the basis of the Commission's next report - ECR7.

He urged the public to forward their views to the Commission by July 31.

"The Government is looking forward to receiving the Commission's recommendations on this important issue later this year," Mr Wong added.

End

CS completes Los Angeles leg of US promotional tour

* * * * *

The Chief Secretary, Mrs Anson Chan, on Tuesday (Los Angeles time) completed her four-day long official visit to Los Angeles.

As head of the Hong Kong-USA '96 delegation, Mrs Chan is on a seven-city promotional tour of the United States, strengthening cultural, economic and academic ties between the territory and the United States.

She spent her final day in Los Angeles meeting the social, business and cultural community.

First on her itinerary was the inaugural meeting of the Hong Kong Schools Alumni Federation in downtown Los Angeles, attended by over 100 members. The Federation is supported by more than 20 Hong Kong schools alumni associations in Southern California which were set up to promote cultural, educational, economic and social activities.

Mrs Chan said she was especially pleased to have been able to include a very strong academic element in her visit to the US.

In addition to meeting the Hong Kong Schools Alumni Association, Mrs Chan had addressed faculties and students at Stanford in San Francisco, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tufts University in Boston, and UCLA in Los Angeles.

"Increasing numbers of the younger generation from Hong Kong are coming to the US for their education as part of the ever growing ties between Hong Kong and the United States," Mrs Chan said, adding that this educational link between Hong Kong and the United States was not a one way street, with a number of US educators teaching in Hong Kong.

Mrs Chan's then visited the Chinatown Senior Citizens Services Center.

She delivered a keynote address to an audience of more than 800 business and community leaders at a luncheon sponsored by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office concluding a half-day business seminar.

The seminar, organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) at the Inter-Continental Hotel, showcased leaders of Hong Kong's industry and government offering practical advice on how to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities in Hong Kong and the Asia Pacific region.

Speakers included Executive Director of HKTDC, Mr Michael Sze, Chairman of Hang Lung Development Co, Mr Ronnie Chan, Group Managing Director of Lam Soon HK Ltd, Mr Raymond Chien, Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourist Association, Mr Y S Lo, and Executive Director of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, Mr Vincent Cheng.

To further strengthen the cultural and entertainment ties between Los Angeles and Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Tourist Association is presenting a week-long festival at Universal City.

Mrs Chan officiated at the opening of "Hong Kong Wonders Never Cease-Live at Universal City Walk."

The "Hong Kong Live" festival kicked off with a dragon dance followed by a non-stop variety show with the best and brightest artistes from Television Broadcasts Ltd.

The booths for "Hong Kong Live" will be running from June 11 to 16 featuring the myriad attractions that Hong Kong has to offer, including cuisine, art and famous Hong Kong sights.

Mrs Chan will travel on Wednesday (June 12) to Washington DC where she will meet with US Administration officials and Congressmen to build on the Governor's visit to Washington in May and to further lobby for the unconditional renewal of China's MFN status.

End

Steady recovery of economic growth in HK forecast

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After achieving a soft landing in 1995, as forecast last year, the economies of the Pacific Region will exhibit faster economic growth in 1996 and 1997 while inflation continues to steadily decrease, according to the 1996-1997 Pacific Economic Outlook (PEO) released today (Wednesday) by the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

PEO, one of the projects of PECC, is a forecast of 20 Pacific Rim economies.

Hong Kong Forecaster for PEO, Mr K C Kwok, and Chief Economist for NE Asia of Standard Chartered Bank, said the Pacific region as a whole experienced a mild slowdown in growth in 1995 following a strong 1994.

He said monetary policies were tightened in many economies to engineer a moderate cooling off. As a result, a soft landing was achieved, laying the ground for a gradual recovery in 1996 and 1997.

However, given the diversity of the region, economic conditions in each economy clearly differ from one another.

PEO attributed the economic recovery in the region to three forces: the expansion of private plant and equipment investment, rapid growth of international trade, and the implementation of economic reform.

Mr Kwok said these three forces helped to enhance economic efficiency and the growth potential of economies in the region, and were important to underpinning the medium term prospects for the region.

For Hong Kong, he said, the economy experienced a cyclical slowdown last year.

While merchandise trade and exports of services actually grew faster in 1995 than in 1994, and domestic investments continued to grow steadily, GDP growth was adversely affected by the weakness in private consumption expenditure.

"However, there are clear signs that the economy is undergoing a gradual cyclical recovery," Mr Kwok continued.

"Growth in consumer spending is bottoming out and there has been a revival in private sector building activity. While growth in merchandise exports slowed down in the first few months of this year, exports of services are expected to have remained strong.

"Overall, the GDP is forecast to grow by 4.8% in 1996 as compared with 4.6% in 1995. Inflation is expected to moderate from 8.7% last year to 7.5%."

Looking forward into 1997, this economic recovery process is expected to continue with GDP growth rising further to 5.2%.

Mr Kwok said business conditions in China were difficult for many Hong Kong investors in the past two years but this was expected to improve gradually in the next two years.

The economic environment globally and in the Pacific region in particular, is also expected to be conducive to steady economic growth in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong forecast published in PEO also discussed concerns related to the return of sovereignty in 1997.

The report highlights that the structure of the Hong Kong economy remains sound, and the territory has strong foreign exchange and fiscal reserves which would enable the territory to deal with problems that may arise (if there are any) as a result of the 1997 transition.

Furthermore, despite concerns about a possible rise in emigration as the territory moves closer to 1997, Mr Kwok said the estimated number of emigrants actually fell during 1992 to 1995.

Indeed, Hong Kong had a rapidly increasing number of immigrants and returning migrants during the past few years, he added.

PECC is tripartite in nature, comprising government officials, business leaders and academics, seeking to develop closer co-operation on trade and economic policy issues in the Pacific region.

Currently, PECC has a total of 22 Members Committees representing the economies of Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, the United States, Vietnam and the Pacific Island Nations.

HKCPEC was formed when Hong Kong became a member of PECC in 1991.

End

Cargo vessel commissioned for CSD

A 24-metre long cargo vessel has been commissioned for the Correctional Services Department (CSD) to ferry rations to its institutions in outlying islands.

The Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Raymond Lai Ming-kee, today (Wednesday) led the honours in the commissioning ceremony for 'Seaway' at Hei Ling Chau.

The brief ceremony, to bring luck to the vessel, included worshipping the sea Goddess Tin Hau at the pier, a lion dance performance, plaque presentation and the cutting of a roast pig.

The 'Seaway' is equipped with a two-tonne hydraulic crane to handle the loading and unloading of cargo, a refrigeration chamber for meat storage and two prisoner compartments for the transfer of prisoners if required.

It is capable of doing 14 knots at full speed and can save 10 to 15 minutes travelling time when visiting the institutions in outlying islands.

End

Good partnership enhances building safety

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The pursuit of quality and safety in buildings and construction in Hong Kong relies on the cooperative and responsible partnership among the building industry, the professionals, and the Government.

The Director of Buildings, Dr Choi Yu-leuk, made the remarks when addressing the opening of the 13th International Building and Construction Exposition at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre this (Wednesday) morning.

He said in the process of building construction, the Government had been playing a regulating and facilitating role to ensure public safety and a satisfactory built environment.

He noted that the Buildings Department had set up a Site Monitoring Section last October to monitor demolition and building sites to ensure that the works on those sites were carried out in a safe manner.

"In the last six months, the team has conducted 1,500 site inspections and has issued 210 advisory letters to building professionals for improvement of site safety.

"The team has won the acclaim of the professionals and contractors in helping to create a safe building environment, safe to the workers and the public alike," Dr Choi said.

Furthermore, for the past year, the department has been discussing with the building professionals and the industry on enhancing safety management of building sites.

The essence consists of refining the requirements and improving the procedure for registering as building contractors and improving the standards on site safety management and clarifying the responsibilities of each party, Dr Choi said.

"These improvements are planned to be implemented with the new approach of self-regulation.

"In line with this approach, the Government will introduce new codes of practice on the management and supervision of the building process," he added.

In order to ensure the new codes are realistic and enforceable by all parties concerned while achieving the objective of enhancing safety, Dr Choi stressed that the professions and the industry would be invited to participate in the drafting of the codes.

"All the building activities and related functions form a chain of events which together lead to the betterment in the quality and safety of buildings and the building process.

"This chain of process requires not only the diligent and conscientious efforts of all the players involved, but also must depend on their interaction and coordination," Dr Choi said.

End

New appointees to civic education committee

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Two new members - Mr Ma Lik and Miss Annie Wu Suk-ching - have been appointed to the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) from April 1 for a term of two years.

Mr Ma is the director of a local newspaper and was the former deputy secretary general of the Basic Law Consultative Committee.

Miss Wu is the managing director of a food catering service company. She is a member of the United Nations Children's Fund, Hong Kong Committee, as well as a member of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council's China Advisory Subcommittee.

Another five incumbent members, including Mrs Anita Chan Fok Po-chun, Mr Raymond Chow Wai-kam, Dr John Ho Dit-sang, Miss Junia Ho Suk-yin and Mr William Tsui Hing-chuen, were re-appointed.

Meanwhile, one of the CPCE members, Dr Fanny Cheung Miu-ching, has recently retired from the Committee.

Other CPCE members are Mr Walter Chan Kar-lok, Mr Jimson Chan Wing-tai, Mr Cheng Kai-nam, Mr Cheung Yin-tung, Dr Patricia Ip Lai-sheung, Mr Lai Chi-tong, Mr Peter Lam Yuk-wah, Mrs Justina Leung Ngai Mou-yin, Dr Lo Chi-kin, Miss Elle Shum Mun-ling, Mr Tai Hap-lap, Mr Benny Tai Yiu-ting, Mr Andrew Yuen Wei-man, and representatives from various government departments.

The Committee is headed by Mr Moses Cheng Mo-chi who was appointed Chairman on July 1 last year.

End

Temporary suspension of ED's enquiry system

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The service of Education Department's 24-hour Automatic Telephone Enquiry System on 2891 0088 will be temporarily suspended from 5 pm on Friday (June 14) until 8.30 am the next Tuesday (June 18) due to disruptions of the electricity supply.

End

The weather of May

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May was slightly cooler than normal, the mean temperature of 25 degrees was 0.9 degrees below the normal figure.

The month's total rainfall of 313.9 millimetres was near normal and the accumulated rainfall since January 1, 654.2 millimetres, was still six per cent above normal. A Rainstorm Red Warning was issued on May 5.

It was rainy on the first day of the month, rain being most heavy in the early afternoon. The weather improved temporarily the next day and there were sunny periods.

However, as a trough of low pressure developed over south China and moved southwards, Hong Kong was affected by occasional heavy rain and thunderstorms from May 4 to 6. Winds also strengthened briefly from the east on the evening of May 5.

The weather remained cloudy with isolated showers until May 12. Meanwhile, easterly winds strengthened again on May 9 but moderated the next day. On May 10, the temperatures dropped to 20.5 degrees, the lowest in the month.

Under the influence of a drier airstream, fine and sunny weather prevailed from May 13 until May 21. Winds during this period were generally moderate easterly.

Temperatures rose to the highest in the month - 30.6 degrees - on May 20. As winds turned southerly two days later and the territory came under a maritime airstream, local weather generally turned cloudy.

Due to a trough of low pressure, weather in Hong Kong deteriorated on May 25 when there were squally thunderstorms. Rainy weather continued till May 30 as this trough lingered along the coastal area and there were again squally thunderstorms on May 29.

As the trough weakened and moved away, weather became fine on the last day of the month.

Two tropical cyclones occurred in the western North Pacific and the South China Sea in May.

Details of the issuance/hoisting and cancellation/lowering of various warnings/signals in the month are summarised in Table 1.1 and monthly meteorological figures and departures from normal of May are tabulated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.1 Warnings and signals in May 1996

Warnings/Signals	Effective date and time
Strong Monsoon Signal	9 May 2300 - 10 May 0810
Rainstorm Warning	
Red	5 May 0645 - 5 May 0900
Flood Warnings	1 May 1315 - 1 May 1430 4 May 1630 - 4 May 2010 5 May 0520 - 5 May 0930 25 May 1930 - 25 May 2345 29 May 0345 - 29 May 0930 29 May 2140 - 30 May 0650
Thunderstorm Warnings	1 May 1125 - 1 May 1425 4 May 1145 - 4 May 2145 5 May 0250 - 5 May 0950 6 May 0315 - 6 May 1700 7 May 1710 - 7 May 2210 25 May 1900 - 26 May 0900 27 May 1130 - 27 May 1430 28 May 0220 - 28 May 1220 28 May 2200 - 29 May 1000 29 May 1100 - 29 May 1300 29 May 2120 - 30 May 0700
Fire Danger Warning	
Yellow	18 May 1230 - 20 May 1800

Table 1.2 Figures and Departures from Normal - May 1996

Total Bright Sunshine	119.7 hours; 34.1 hours below normal
Mean Daily Global Solar Radiation	13.60 MJ/SQM; 2.52 MJ/SQM below normal
Total Rainfall	313.9 mm; 2.8 mm below normal
Mean Cloud Amount	75%; 1% above normal
Mean Relative Humidity	81%; 2% below normal
Mean Daily Maximum Temperature	27.6 Degrees Celcius; 1.1 Degrees Celcius below normal
Mean Air Temperature	25 Degrees Celcius; 0.9 Degree Celcius below normal
Mean Daily Minimum Temperature	23.2 Degrees Celcius; 0.7 Degree Celcius below normal
Mean Dew Point	21.3 Degrees Celcius; 1.3 Degrees Celcius below normal
Total Evaporation	119.8 mm; 17.9 mm below normal

Remarks: All measurements were made at the Royal Observatory except sunshine, solar radiation and evaporation which were recorded at King's Park.

End

Two NT lots to let

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The Lands Department is inviting tenders for the short-term tenancy of two pieces of government land in the New Territories.

The first lot located in Ping Shun Street, Yuen Long, has an area of about 2,952 square metres. It is intended for use as a fee-paying public car park for the parking of motor vehicles, excluding container vehicles, but including container tractors without container trailers.

The tenancy is for two years, renewable quarterly.

The second lot is situated at Wu On Street, Area 44, Tuen Mun. With an area of about 2,400 square metres, the lot is also designated for use as a fee-paying public car park for the parking of private cars, goods vehicles and buses, excluding container tractors and trailers.

The tenancy is for three years, renewable quarterly.

The closing date for submission of tenders is at noon on June 28.

Tender forms, tender notices and conditions may be obtained from the Lands Department, 14th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road and the District Lands Offices of Kowloon, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun.

Tender plans can also be inspected at these offices.

End

Advanced welfare payment for public holidays

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Recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) under the bank payment system may receive their payments on Friday (June 14) if their pay days fall on the coming public holidays (June 15 to June 17).

"Special payment arrangements will also be made for recipients of Social Security Allowance whose pay days fall within this period," a Social Welfare Department spokesman said.

For those who have bank accounts in Hongkong Bank or Hang Seng Bank can receive their payments on Friday whereas those with accounts in other banks will receive their payments after the public holidays on Tuesday (June 18).

In case of doubt, recipients are advised to contact their respective social security field units.

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	1,878	0930	+83
Closing balance in the account	1,888	1000	+83
Change attributable to :		1100	+85
Money market activity	+55	1200	+85
LAF today	-45	1500	+85
		1600	+55

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 124.5 *+0.1* 12.6.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	5.01	2 years	2805	6.30	99.77	6.53
1 month	5.09	3 years	3904	6.30	98.73	6.91
3 months	5.25	5 years	5106	7.23	99.29	7.54
6 months	5.46	7 years	7305	7.60	99.32	7.88
12 months	5.87	5 years	M502	7.30	98.92	7.73

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$30,647 million

Closed June 12, 1996

End