



SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 1974

# DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

P.W.D. REFUTES ALLEGATIONS IN SOME NEWSPAPER REPORTS

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THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT TODAY REFUTED ALLEGATIONS CONTAINED IN RECENT REPORTS IN SOME NEWSPAPERS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE BUILDING AUTHORITY HAD NEEDLESSLY DELAYED THE OCCUPATION OF CERTAIN MULTI-STOREY BUILDINGS LOCATED IN HILLSIDE AREAS OF HONG KONG.

A SPOKESMAN FOR THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE OFFICE SAID THAT THE ALLEGATIONS MAY HAVE GIVEN THE IMPRESSION THAT THE BUILDING AUTHORITY WAS BEING OBSTRUCTIVE IN INSISTING ON THE SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF ALL CONSTRUCTION WORK, INCLUDING SITE FORMATION ASPECTS, BEFORE GRANTING OCCUPATION PERMITS.

+SOME OF THE QUOTATIONS ATTRIBUTED TO DEVELOPERS,+ SAID THE SPOKESMAN, +CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN UNCHALLENGED. FIRSTLY, THEY CONTAIN FACTUAL INACCURACIES. SECONDLY, THEY TAKE NO ACCOUNT OF THE NEED TO SAFEGUARD THE PUBLIC, WHICH IS WHAT THE BUILDING ORDINANCE, AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF IT, ARE ALL ABOUT.

+THESE OMISSIONS ARE ALMOST INCREDIBLE IN THE CASES OF THE THREE BUILDING SITES WHICH HAVE BEEN SINGLED OUT IN THESE REPORTS, SINCE TWO OF THEM ARE ON HILLSIDES AND THE OTHER IS AT THE FOOT OF A SLOPE.

+THERE WAS,+ THE SPOKESMAN CONTINUED, +VERY STRONG PUBLIC BACKING FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE, FOLLOWING THE JUNE 1972 LANDSLIDE DISASTERS, TO GIVE THE STAFF OF THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE OFFICE MORE POWERS IN DEALING WITH SITE FORMATION WORKS.

+THE FACT THAT THIS AUTHORITY IS BEING USED AS THE LAW INTENDS AND DEMANDS IS HARDLY SURPRISING,+ SAID THE SPOKESMAN. +NOR IS IT SURPRISING THAT FULL USE IS BEING MADE OF THE ADDITIONAL CIVIL ENGINEERING EXPERTISE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE OFFICE AS A RESULT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE 1972 LANDSLIDES.

+WHAT SURELY WOULD BE SURPRISING, AND A MATTER FOR GRAVE PUBLIC CONCERN, WOULD BE ANY FAILURE BY THE BUILDING AUTHORITY TO USE THESE EXTRA POWERS AND RESOURCES.+

THE SPOKESMAN THEN COMMENTED ON THE FIRST OF THE THREE SITES MENTIONED, NO. 5 SING WOO CRESCENT IN HAPPY VALLEY.

+IN THIS CASE,+ HE SAID, +THE AUTHORISED ARCHITECT IS WELL AWARE - INDEED HE HAS SPECIFICALLY RECOGNISED - THAT THERE ARE ASPECTS OF THE SITE FORMATION WORK WHICH REQUIRE FURTHER INVESTIGATION BEFORE AN OCCUPATION PERMIT CAN BE ISSUED. HE IS NOW ENGAGED IN THIS NECESSARY PROCESS OF INVESTIGATION. IF THE OUTCOME OF THIS INVESTIGATION CONTAINS NO CAUSE FOR CONCERN, THEN AN OCCUPATION PERMIT WOULD OF COURSE BE GRANTED.+

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TURNING TO THE SECOND BUILDING CITED, CARAVAN COURT IN CAINE ROAD, THE SPOKESMAN SAID:

+THE ALLEGATION IN THIS CASE - THAT IT WAS THE ACTION OF THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT IN REQUIRING DEMOLITION OF THREE PRE-WAR BUILDINGS NEXT DOOR THAT CAUSED A RETAINING WALL TO BECOME UNSAFE AND IN NEED OF RECONSTRUCTION - IS QUITE INCORRECT.

+THE RAPID DETERIORATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE THREE PRE-WAR BUILDINGS, WHICH RESULTED IN THE ORDERS FOR THEIR DEMOLITION, TOOK PLACE AT THE SAME TIME AS PILING OPERATIONS FOR CARAVAN COURT. THE SUBSEQUENT DEMOLITION OF THESE BUILDINGS REVEALED THAT THE RETAINING WALL BETWEEN CARAVAN COURT AND THE DEMOLITION SITE HAD ALSO BECOME UNSAFE. ACCORDINGLY A NOTICE WAS SERVED ON THE DEVELOPER OF CARAVAN COURT IN NOVEMBER 1972 REQUIRING THE DEMOLITION OF THIS RETAINING WALL AND ITS REINSTATEMENT. THIS WORK WAS NOT COMPLETED UNTIL JULY THIS YEAR (I.E. 20 MONTHS LATER), WHEN AN OCCUPATION PERMIT WAS ISSUED.+

THE THIRD BUILDING MENTIONED WAS HONG KONG GARDEN IN SEYMOUR ROAD. IN THIS CASE THE SPOKESMAN COMMENTED:  
+UNMISTAKABLE EVIDENCE CAME TO LIGHT DURING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THIS BUILDING THAT STABILITY PROBLEMS COULD ARISE ON THIS HILLSIDE SITE AND THAT THESE PROBLEMS WOULD HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH BEFORE THE QUESTION OF GIVING AN OCCUPATION PERMIT COULD BE CONSIDERED (IN FACT, THE AUTHORISED ARCHITECT HAS NOT EVEN APPLIED FOR SUCH A PERMIT).

+THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE OFFICE REQUIRED THE DEVELOPER TO INVESTIGATE THESE PROBLEMS, AND THE FINDINGS OF THE CONSULTANTS BROUGHT IN BY THE DEVELOPER HIMSELF FULLY CONFIRMED THE VIEW THAT THE PROBLEMS WERE SERIOUS.

+THUS BOTH THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPERTS AND THE PROFESSIONAL ADVISERS ENGAGED BY THE DEVELOPERS ARE IN FULL AGREEMENT THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM AND CLEARLY THE QUESTION OF OCCUPATION MUST AWAIT THE COMPLETION OF THE WORKS NOW IN HAND WHICH SHOULD CORRECT THE SITUATION.

+THE DEVELOPER'S ARCHITECT AND ENGINEERS ARE ACTIVELY TAKING STEPS TO DEAL WITH, AND ELIMINATE, ANY POTENTIAL HAZARDS. THE FACT THAT THESE PROBLEMS ONLY CAME FULLY TO LIGHT DURING THE COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION IS QUITE IRRELEVANT TO THE NEED TO FACE UP TO THEM AND SOLVE THEM. THE LAW REQUIRES THEIR SOLUTION, AND FOR THE BUILDING AUTHORITY TO IGNORE THEM WOULD AMOUNT NOT ONLY TO A DISREGARD OF THE LAW BUT ALSO AN ABROGATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL LEGAL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY RESTING ON THE STAFF OF THE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE OFFICE, WHICH IS THE PROTECTION OF LIFE AND PROPERTY.+

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**ACCIDENT FIGURES IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY STILL HIGH**  
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THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN A HIGH-RISK JOB FOR WORKERS ALL OVER THE WORLD. BUT EVEN ALLOWING FOR THIS, HONG KONG BUILDING SITES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN NOTORIOUSLY ACCIDENT-PRONE.

IN FACT, LABOUR DEPARTMENT FIGURES SHOW THAT A BUILDING WORKER IS KILLED OR INJURED EVERY 35 WORKING MINUTES - A GRIM RECORD BY INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS.

HONG KONG BUILDERS, OF COURSE, PLEAD THAT THEIRS IS A SPECIAL CASE : THEY SAY THE DOMINATION OF HIGH RISE WORK WITH MEN AND EQUIPMENT OPERATING IN CRAMPED AREAS ACCENTUATES THE ACCEPTED RISKS OF THE TRADE.

DESPITE THIS, INDUSTRIAL SAFETY AUTHORITIES HAVE WARNED MANAGEMENT REPEATEDLY THAT ITS JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLE THAT A WORKER'S LIFE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN MEETING A COMPLETION DATE AND THEN DO NOTHING ABOUT IT.

THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW SIGNS RECENTLY THAT THE MESSAGE MIGHT BE GETTING THROUGH - AT LEAST TO SOME SECTIONS OF THE INDUSTRY.

+THE BUILDING INDUSTRY HAS A SHOCKING SAFETY RECORD AND WE WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE CHANGE IT,+ SAYS MR. STAN TSAO OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT'S INDUSTRIAL UNDERTAKINGS UNIT. +WE KNOW THE PROBLEM CANNOT BE LICKED TOMORROW, BUT WE HAVE GAINED THE FEELING IN RECENT MONTHS THAT MANAGEMENT ATTITUDES ARE SLOWLY CHANGING.+

MR. TSAO HEADS A TASK FORCE OF 15 FULL-TIME +SAFETY+ INSPECTORS CHARGED WITH IMPLEMENTING THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITES (SAFETY) REGULATIONS WHICH CAME INTO FORCE ON MAY 1 THIS YEAR.

THE REGULATIONS LAY DOWN THE MINIMUM STANDARDS THAT MUST BE FOLLOWED TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF BUILDING WORKERS. DEPARTMENT OFFICERS STRESS THE WORD 'MINIMUM' AND HAVE BEEN POINTING OUT TO EMPLOYERS THAT THE REGULATIONS REALLY PROVIDE A BASIS ON WHICH PROPER INDUSTRIAL SAFETY CAN BE BUILT.

SINCE THE REGULATIONS CAME INTO FORCE, THE SAFETY UNIT HAS BEEN WORKING QUIETLY, BUT FORCEFULLY WHEN NECESSARY, TO MAKE SURE THAT THE NEW REGULATIONS ARE OBSERVED AND FULLY UNDERSTOOD.

AND WHERE FORMAL AND INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PERSUASION HAVE FAILED, THE DEPARTMENT HAS SHOWN THAT IT IS PREPARED TO BARE ITS STATUTORY TEETH. LAST MONTH, THE COMMISSIONER FOR LABOUR TOOK OUT TWO SUMMONSES UNDER THE NEW SAFETY REGULATIONS AGAINST A MAJOR CONSTRUCTION COMPANY FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF TWO WORKERS. THE CASE COMES UP BEFORE THE TSUEN WAN COURT ON SEPTEMBER 13.

SAYS MR. TSAO: +WE WILL PROSECUTE WHENEVER AND AS OFTEN AS NECESSARY, BUT WE WOULD MUCH RATHER WIN THE CO-OPERATION OF THE INDUSTRY SO THAT PROSECUTION BECOMES UNNECESSARY.

+OF COURSE, SAFETY COSTS MONEY. BUT HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE VALUE OF A MAN'S LIFE?

+WE SIMPLY CANNOT ACCEPT THE ARGUMENT THAT BRITISH, AUSTRALIAN AND AMERICAN STANDARDS OF SAFETY CANNOT BE APPLIED IN HONG KONG.

+WE DON'T WANT TO SEE OUR BUILDINGS AS A PERMANENT MONUMENT TO THE WIDOWS AND CHILDREN OF WORKERS WHO HAVE DIED BUILDING THEM.+

THE MOST RECENT ACCIDENT FIGURES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ILLUSTRATE THE PROBLEM. IN THE SIX MONTHS ENDING JUNE, 28 CONSTRUCTION WORKERS DIED AND ANOTHER 2,165 WERE INJURED IN HONG KONG. THE OVERALL PICTURE IS THAT EVERY FIFTH INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT VICTIM HAPPENS ON A BUILDING SITE.

FOR ALL THAT, THE DEPARTMENT'S SAFETY EXPERTS ARE NOT ENTIRELY PESSIMISTIC AND OFFER AS A HOPEFUL EXAMPLE THE NEW AIR CARGO TERMINAL BUILDING PROJECT AT KAI TAK AIRPORT.

THE HARBOUR ENGINEERING CO. LTD., A COMPARATIVE NEWCOMER TO THE FIELD, STARTED CONSTRUCTION OF THE 165 CAISSONS FOR THE NEW BUILDING SIX MONTHS AGO - AND IN THAT TIME HAVE NOT REPORTED A SERIOUS ACCIDENT ON THE \$22 MILLION JOB.

THIS, SAY SAFETY OFFICERS, IS A REMARKABLE RECORD IN VIEW OF THE DANGER OF CAISSON WORK, WHERE MEN OFTEN WORK 150 FT. UNDERGROUND IN THE NARROW MAN-MADE CYLINDERS WHICH SUPPORT THE FOUNDATIONS OF SO MANY HONG KONG BUILDINGS.

THE CAISSON EXCAVATORS FACE DANGER FROM ESCAPING POISONOUS GAS, CAVE-INS, FLOODING, QUICKSAND AND FALLING OBJECTS.

THE INDUSTRY HAS LOST MANY WORKERS IN CAISSONS - ONLY LAST APRIL TWO SUFFOCATED IN QUICKSAND AT THE BOTTOM OF A CAISSON AT WANCHAI. AND IN 1972, THERE WAS FEARFUL TRAGEDY ON A VICTORIA ROAD SITE WHEN FOUR CAISSON WORKERS WERE KILLED BY ESCAPING CARBON DIOXIDE - THE LAST THREE LOSING THEIR LIVES IN RESCUE ATTEMPTS.

AT THE KAI TAK SITE, A SERIES OF MEASURES HAVE BEEN ADOPTED TO CUT DOWN THE RISK OF SUCH DISASTERS TO A MINIMUM. THE MEASURES WERE DESIGNED BY THE COMPANY'S 26-YEAR-OLD SITE ENGINEER, MR. TANG SUN-TIN, WHO DISCUSSED HIS IDEAS WITH HIS FOREMEN AND KEY WORKERS BEFORE PUTTING THEM INTO OPERATION.

BEFORE WORK STARTED, A SYSTEM OF STEEL TUBES, WOODEN BATTENS AND TIMBER FRAMEWORK WAS INSTALLED IN STRATEGIC PARTS OF THE WORKING AREA TO PREVENT SEEPAGE OF WATER AND GAS AND TO STRENGTHEN THE WALLS AGAINST COLLAPSE.

**OTHER SAFETY FEATURES INCLUDE:**

- A WORKING PLATFORM WITH SAFETY FENCE TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF PEOPLE FALLING INSIDE THE CAISSONS.
- TOE BOARDS AROUND THE EXCAVATION OPENING TO PREVENT MATERIALS DROPPING IN.
- SPECIALLY DESIGNED AIR BLOWERS PUSHING THROUGH ENOUGH FRESH AIR FOR UP TO 800 AIR CHANGES AN HOUR.
- A SERIES OF SPECIAL LIGHTS RUNNING DOWN THE CAISSON TO GIVE ADDITIONAL LIGHT.
- ELECTRIC AND STRING-PULLED BELLS FOR IMMEDIATE COMMUNICATION.
- SMALL METAL HAND GRIPS PLACED 18 INCHES APART ON EACH SIDE OF THE CAISSON TO GIVE WORKERS AN INSTANT EMERGENCY ESCAPE SYSTEM.

IN RETURN FOR THE SAFETY MEASURES, THE COMPANY EXPECTS - AND HAS RECEIVED - A HIGH LEVEL OF WORKMANSHIP AND PRODUCTIVITY. WORKERS WHO HAVE PRODUCED SLOPPY PERFORMANCES HAVE BEEN PUT OFF, ON THE GROUNDS THAT POOR WORKMANSHIP ON VITAL MATERIALS COULD ENDANGER THE LIVES OF THE EXCAVATORS WORKING BELOW.

SAYS MR. TANG: +THESE MEASURES HAVE COST US A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT. BUT BY GIVING OUR WORKERS A FEELING OF SECURITY, THEY ARE MORE RELAXED AND HAVE GIVEN US MUCH GREATER EFFICIENCY.+

A HIGH-LEVEL TEAM OF LABOUR DEPARTMENT EXPERTS VISITED THE SITE LAST WEEK AND CAME AWAY HIGHLY IMPRESSED BY WHAT THEY DESCRIBED AS A SAFETY +MODEL+ FOR BUILDING PROJECTS.

BUT THEY SAY THE MEASURES ADOPTED VOLUNTARILY BY THE COMPANY AND ITS ATTITUDE TO SITE SAFETY ARE THE EXCEPTION RATHER THAN THE RULE.

+WHAT WE ARE DETERMINED TO DO,+ SAYS MR. TSAO, +IS TO MAKE IT THE RULE, RATHER THAN THE EXCEPTION.+

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**HONG KONG-UNITED STATES TEXTILES TALKS**

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REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES AND HONG KONG GOVERNMENTS WILL HOLD TALKS TOMORROW (MONDAY) ON TECHNICAL MATTERS RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED HONG KONG/US TEXTILE AGREEMENT.

THE UNITED STATES DELEGATION IS LED BY MR. A.J. JURICH, MR. LAWRENCE MILLS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, WILL HEAD THE HONG KONG DELEGATION.

A SPOKESMAN OF THE COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY DEPARTMENT SAID: +THE TALKS ARE ENTIRELY ON OPERATIONAL MATTERS, AND ARE PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH THE EXPORT AUTHORISATION SYSTEM FOR CATEGORIES WITHOUT SPECIFIC LIMITS WHICH THE DEPARTMENT WILL OPERATE IN THE NEXT TEXTILE YEAR TO REPLACE THE EXISTING TRIGGER POINT SYSTEM.+

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**TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS AT UPPER LEVELS**

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PARK ROAD, FROM ITS JUNCTION OF ROBINSON ROAD TO THE JUNCTION OF LYTTELTON ROAD, WILL BE CLOSED TO ALL NORTHBOUND TRAFFIC FROM 10 A.M. ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 20.

THE CLOSURE, WHICH WILL LAST UNTIL THE END OF THE MONTH, IS TO FACILITATE ROAD WORKS.

SOUTHBOUND TRAFFIC ALONG THE 'BUS-ONLY' LANE WILL NOT BE AFFECTED.

TRAFFIC FROM ROBINSON ROAD TO PARK ROAD MAY PROCEED BY WAY OF OAKLANDS AVENUE AND LYTTELTON ROAD.

APPROPRIATE TRAFFIC SIGNS WILL BE ERECTED TO GUIDE MOTORISTS.

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