



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

ISSUED BY GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES
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Thursday, January 30, 1997

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Statement by the Governor

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The following is a statement today (Thursday) by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, on the continuing debate over civil liberties in Hong Kong.

It is now almost a fortnight since the media reported recommendations - yet to be officially announced or explained - by a Sub Group of the Preparatory Committee to repeal or amend certain Hong Kong Ordinances, including the Bill of Rights Ordinance (BORO), the Societies (Amendment) Ordinance of 1992 and the Public Order (Amendment) Ordinance of 1995. The Preparatory Committee will meet in Peking this weekend. It will no doubt be considering the recommendations which have been put to it, as well as the reaction to which these recommendations have given rise in Hong Kong and internationally.

I hope that in doing so the Preparatory Committee will pay careful attention to the opinions which have been expressed by virtually the entire community in Hong Kong: by those who speak, for example, for business, for the practice of law, for the media and for the grass roots; even by members of the Preparatory Committee itself and of the so-called Provisional Legislature. On few issues over the years has there been such a clear and broad consensus, embracing almost all shades of the political spectrum. To these voices have been added those overseas - including not only British Ministers but most recently President Clinton - who wish Hong Kong well, and who want to believe in "one country, two systems", but who are deeply concerned at the prospect that Hong Kong's freedoms will be eroded.

If, in the light of these opinions and the advice which it will no doubt hear from those of its members who have been appointed to speak for Hong Kong people, the Preparatory Committee decides to draw back from endorsing these ideas, Hong Kong will breath a sigh of relief, and the "one country, two systems" model will pass, and be seen to pass, one of the stiffest tests which it has so far faced. If not, the damage to Hong Kong will be enormous and irrevocable.

Why are these proposals so harmful, and just how much do they put at stake? The Joint Declaration promised that Hong Kong will continue to enjoy a "high degree of autonomy" except in foreign affairs and defence; that its way of life and its cherished freedoms will be protected, in particular by the continued application of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and that, above all, the established common law system, the foundation of which is the rule of law, will continue to prevail. These are the standards against which not only these proposals but any decision about Hong Kong's future must be measured if the "one country, two systems" concept is to fulfil the promise which its architects intended.

So do these recommendations reflect autonomy? Are they an example of Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong? They certainly have nothing to do with foreign affairs or defence. But nobody who has spent more than a few minutes in Hong Kong over the last few days can be in any doubt that they are repugnant to the community. On that basis alone the Preparatory Committee should reject the proposals, and leave decisions about civil liberties to the SAR Government accountable as promised to an elected legislature.

What about freedoms? Is it true, as has been suggested, that the proposals will not undermine Hong Kong's civil liberties?

A cornerstone of our freedoms is, and will through Article 39 of the Basic Law remain, the International Covenant. The International Covenant is incorporated into the law of Hong Kong by the BORO. One of the provisions which the Sub-Group would like deleted is Section 3(2) of the BORO. That provision reflects the common law principle that pre-existing legislation that cannot be construed consistently with an Ordinance is, to the extent of the inconsistency, repealed. If that provision goes, what will be the legal status of pre-existing legislation that is in breach of the ICCPR, and therefore of Article 39 of the Basic Law? At the very least, the removal of the provision would cast doubt over the way in which the Covenant's provisions would apply, and therefore weaken the protection provided under those provisions. Looked at from any angle, that would be a body blow to Hong Kong's freedoms, not to mention to the integrity of the BL itself. So, self-evidently, would the intended restoration of obsolete provisions on public order and the regulation of societies which contravene the Covenant, and thus the BL itself.

But autonomy and freedom mean nothing in any case unless they are embedded in the rule of law. And it is to the rule of law that these proposals pose the most serious threat of all. The distinguished Chairman of the Bar Association, who speaks with great authority on the matter, has made clear the Association's view in her letter of 27 January 1997 to Mr C H Tung, that "the recommendations of the Legal Sub-Group seriously undermine the Rule of Law." In that same letter, the Chairman states that the rule of law requires that "the process of making and repealing law is open, reasoned and in accordance with the law. If not, those in power can make or change law at whim, and it will become rule by the people in power."

Open? The Sub Group has conducted its deliberations entirely behind closed doors. Not only has it made no serious attempt to explain its recommendations, but the recommendations themselves have yet to be authoritatively announced. The community has had to rely on incomplete and contradictory press reports. We do not even know exactly how many Ordinances are to be affected.

Reasoned? That would require an explanation of which particular provisions of the Basic Law are being breached and how; of the legal mechanism by which the earlier Ordinances would be reinstated; and of how this reinstatement would itself avoid breaching the BL provisions on freedoms and the Covenants. These questions are being asked, not only by the Hong Kong Government, but by most sections of the community. No serious effort has been made to answer them. For example, the only Article of the BL which has been cited to justify gutting the BORO is Article 160. But that only empowers the Standing Committee of the National Peoples' Congress to declare that extant laws contravene the Basic Law. It contains nothing about the basis for recommending such a declaration in this or any other specific case. In other words, like the old song, "we're here because we're here". That may be good enough for the Sub Group, but it is not good enough for Hong Kong. Under Hong Kong's legal system, any proposed legislative act must be justified thoroughly in terms of Hong Kong's laws. Failure to provide such justification not only invites legal challenge to the act itself, but also undermines the integrity of the legal system as a whole.

According to law? Take what happens under the common law when an Ordinance is repealed. Earlier legislation on the subject does not, contrary to some misleading statements which have been made, spring mysteriously back to life. There would be a vacuum, which would need somehow to be filled in a proper and legal manner by new legislation. But only one body can legislate for Hong Kong before 1 July, and that is the Legislative Council. No attempt has been made to explain how this problem will be addressed. There is no way of addressing it in the terms apparently envisaged by the Sub Group which would not itself be legally questionable. The result will be a legal shambles, whose only effects will be to discredit Hong Kong's legal system and those responsible for upholding it, and to bring down a series of harmful legal challenges from 1 July onwards.

The Bar Association has made clear in a recent paper that not only is it unnecessary to make these changes, it would also be senseless in legal terms to attempt to do so. "It would be an exercise in legislative futility", the Association states, "to seek to re-enact a law known to be inconsistent with the ICCPR because, with or without the Bill of Rights, such a law would also be inconsistent with Article 39 of the Basic Law and/or those provisions of the Basic Law which guarantee specific rights such as the right to be presumed to be innocent ... and would be unconstitutional and liable to be declared so by judges exercising powers of final adjudication under Article 19 of the Basic Law." What could be clearer than this as a statement of the legal position?

There is another problem which has not yet been addressed in this one-sided debate. The laws in question do not only affect civil liberties. If implemented, the proposals would also cause collateral damage on many other fronts, for example in the SARG's ability to combat organised crime. The Societies (Amendment) Ordinance stiffened the previous penalties for various triad offences. If the old Ordinance is, as apparently intended, reinstated, the earlier penalties would apply. The only winner from such a manoeuvre would be the triads. There is no sign that any attempt has been made to think through these and other very important side effects of the proposals. Nor is there any explanation, for example, of why it is necessary, by repealing the Ordinance under which it was established, to scrap the Boundaries and Election Commission, a body which has established a world class reputation for the impartial, efficient and vigilant supervision of Hong Kong's electoral process. Whatever electoral procedures apply in future, Hong Kong needs such a body.

If there is no legal justification in Hong Kong terms for the recommendations, are they at least necessary to ensure stability and order in Hong Kong? Patently not. Hong Kong is among the safest, most stable, most law abiding communities in the world. That is because our laws and culture of government have found a reasonable, decent, balance between the rights of the individual and the interests of society at large. A balance which has been struck and adjusted over the years in response to the evolving demands and aspirations of this dynamic community, not in response to outside dictates. To turn the clock back for reasons of misguided political expediency will upset that balance, unsettle the community, and create unnecessary and serious problems for the SARG. It also risks radicalising the hitherto extremely moderate debate in Hong Kong. Is that really what the Sub Group wants?

Not only in Hong Kong have people been expressing concerns of this kind. These recommendations have given Hong Kong's future a bad press all around the world. It has been said, absurdly, that we should not worry unduly about that, and that foreigners should refrain from speaking their minds about Hong Kong. Hong Kong is an international city. One of our greatest strengths has been the willingness of our partners to believe in "one country, two systems" and to do what they can to make it work. If they stop believing, no amount of self belief here in Hong Kong will be enough. We need investors, governments, columnists around the world to give Hong Kong the benefit of the doubt, or the world will simply stop treating Hong Kong as autonomous, whether we like it or not. And like it or not, Hong Kong is now in the international spotlight. Those taking decisions about our future must ensure that all their actions withstand the unforgiving scrutiny which we can now expect.

But the crux of the matter is this. A Chinese official stated with disarming frankness a few days ago that the so-called Provisional Legislature "exists under a legal system different from that of the British Hong Kong LegCo". But it is the continued application of Hong Kong's legal system which has been promised, with no exemptions. Unless every decision about Hong Kong's future - by the Provisional Legislature, the Preparatory Committee or whoever - is taken and satisfactorily explained in accordance with that system, unless political expediency remains subject in every situation to the rule of law, nobody - in Hong Kong or elsewhere - will believe that "one country, two systems" can work. That is not what is happening on civil liberties. Those giving this advice appear either to misunderstand the common law or to regard it as dispensable: it is difficult to say which is more ominous, or more shameful.

That is why these proposals threaten not only Hong Kong's freedoms (important though they are) but also the very viability of the Basic Law and the solemn promises it contains. And that is why the community has a right to expect that the Preparatory Committee will return immediately both to the letter and the much abused spirit of Hong Kong's future constitutional arrangements by rejecting the Sub Group's advice. Hong Kong is entitled to know, before 1 July, whether China still believes in "one country, two systems" or whether it now wants to impose "one country, one system" in contravention of its international obligations and its solemn promises to the six million people of Hong Kong.

End

Transcript of the Governor's media session

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The following is a transcript of the media session by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten; and the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hanley, after visiting the Central and Western District this (Thursday) afternoon:

Governor: I am delighted to have been able to visit Central and Western District again with the Minister, Mr Hanley, who's been on district visit with me before. It's been interesting to talk to the District Board about some of the problems that they face and we're in particular concerned to get an early decision on the Kennedy Town redevelopment and to deal with some of the re-housing problems in housing estates which are being redeveloped.

Question: Mr Patten, you released a statement concerning the Bill of Rights and democratic development of Hong Kong in future. Would you please summarise ...?

Governor: I think that the main point of my statement is a reiteration of the argument put so cogently in her letter to the Chief Executive (designate) by the Chairman of the Bar Association Audrey Eu. She said very clearly that the proposals which are being considered this weekend by the Preparatory Committee to weaken Hong Kong's civil liberties protection, would undermine the rule of law. That was her argument. She further argued and I totally agree that the proposals represent an exercise in legislative futility. How can you strike down laws which are in line with the International Covenants and replace them with laws that aren't, when the Basic Law itself makes it clear that those International Covenants should be applied to Hong Kong. I want to say a couple of other things about the arguments that we've seen in the last few days. People sometimes suggest that Hong Kong doesn't care about civil liberties and human rights. Nothing could be further from the truth. We've seen in recent weeks, in recent days, just how much, just how deeply this community feels about its freedom. We've also seen within weeks of the transition within just over 150 days of the transition, people prepared to stand up and speak out for what they believe in. In this instance, given a lead by the legal profession, both the Bar Association and the Law Society speaking out to protect what is the core of our success as a civil, free society. I very much hope that members of the Preparatory Committee will take account of that when they consider these matters this weekend.

Question: C H Tung had said that he would like to have one or more civil servants in secretary grade to help him in the transition period. What do you say about that?

Governor: I say that the right place to discuss these things is between Mr Tung and myself and the Chief Secretary. And I am sure if Mr Tung has proposals he will put them to us. But I wish to add, I wish to add one other point. I am responsible for the good administration of Hong Kong until June 30. That is British's responsibility. And it is incumbent upon China under Article 30 of the Joint Declaration to support Britain in the good and successful administration of Hong Kong. So I hope we'll see that co-operation and I hope nobody will make any proposals which would make it more difficult to give people in Hong Kong the good government which this community deserves.

Question: ... comment on Elizabeth Wong's motion in LegCo?

Governor: That's entirely a matter for the Legislative Council. I was asked the question on the subject last week and replied with my traditional courtesy and restraint.

Question: In the interview, you blamed some Hong Kong businessmen not keep their promise to support your democracy movement in Hong Kong. Why don't you name those businessmen? Don't you think it is unfair to other businessmen in Hong Kong if you don't tell us ...?

Governor: No, I think they know who they are.

Question: Governor, what is the new consulate ... concerning Britain's relations with Hong Kong?

Governor: I think the new consulate underlines Britain's continuing commitment to Hong Kong. But perhaps Mr Hanley would like to add a word on that.

Minister: Certainly I think that the continuing relationship between the United Kingdom and Hong Kong is better going to be served by this excellent new building and the people working in it. Not only will there be a thousand British businesses still trading in Hong Kong, but there will be many hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people for whom the United Kingdom has a special obligation. But our obligation isn't only economic and it's not only consulate. It is also one which is a moral obligation and I hope that we will continue to monitor what occurs to try to make sure that this transition leads into a successful future for Hong Kong so that its future is even better than the miraculous past. This building is a remarkable building and over 31 million pounds, it is bigger than the vast majority of embassies that we have worldwide and I think symbolises therefore properly the close connections between the United Kingdom and Hong Kong which will exist for all time.

Governor: Can I just add one sentence or two to what I've said to your question earlier. I think when you get back to the office, you will see that the agency concerned have issued a retraction and have put out a new statement which is this time accurate rather than wholly inaccurate. But since most of you didn't believe the original agency report, I don't think that will make very much difference ...

Question: How can you guarantee that local businessmen ...?

Governor: Well, if people are to lose as it were the share of their market for their products because of their personal beliefs then that would be an exceptionally bad day for Hong Kong and would mean that Hong Kong would cease to be one of the leading financial and business centres in the world.

Question: ... House of Lords ... Bill on British citizenship ... ethnic minorities ...?

Governor: The Government knows what the view of the Governor of Hong Kong is on this subject. So do members of the House of Commons and I would be surprised if my views weren't quoted fairly frequently when the issue is debated in the House of the Commons.

Question: How do the proposals of the Preparatory Committee violate the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law?

Governor: I've set out at length the Bar Association and the Law Society have set out at length just why the proposals infringe and undermine the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. But there is one simple point which perhaps best describes that. In the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, the International Covenants and what they say about freedom and political rights, those International Covenants are to be applied to Hong Kong, they are to be applied to Hong Kong through the Basic Law. Now what is being proposed by the Preparatory Committee are measures which would be in flagrant disregard of the International Covenants. You can't put back on the statute book Bills which have been taken off the statute book because they are not in line with the International Covenants without contravening the International Covenants. Everybody in Hong Kong knows that this is an extremely simple issue which goes as the Bar Association has pointed out as the leaders of the legal profession of Hong Kong have pointed out which goes right to the heart of the rule of law and right to the heart of the protection of our civil liberties. These aren't marginal issues. If they were marginal issues, why do you think that President Clinton of the United States would be concerned about them. He is not misinformed about what is going on in Hong Kong. He is doubtless told what people like the leaders of our legal profession say. Is it being argued that the chairman of the Bar Association is misleading people? Is it being argued that the Law Society is misleading people? Is it being argued that those distinguished lawyers who wrote in this morning's papers with their views on this issue are misleading people? The fact of the matter is that these would be damaging proposals indeed. I want to say one thing finally. Either Hong Kong has the same freedoms after 1997 or it doesn't? If it doesn't, then that is clearly a departure from the Joint Declaration and from the Basic Law and from all those promises which have been made to people in Hong Kong. So the question to ask people is this: Is Hong Kong going to have the same freedom after 1997? Yes or no? That is a question which I am going to go on asking and I suspect it is a question which you are going to go on asking as well. Thank you very much.

Question: Mr Hanley, one question. Does the British Government fully in support or stand up for what Mr Patten just said?

Minister: Yes, I endorse entirely what the Governor says. The Governor is absolutely right. We have made it clear when I spoke to the Chinese ambassador in London that we believe that what they are proposing and what the legal sub-group has proposed is totally inconsistent with the Basic Law. We have pointed out Article 39, we have pointed out that there is no logic or legal advice which support their view whatsoever and we have said that all we have done in the past is to make the law of Hong Kong consistent with what have been agreed with the Chinese previously. Not only that but what they are doing is inconsistent as well with the fact that it's for the SAR government to legislate if they wish not for legislation in advance, or even suggested legislation in advance. So I fully support the Governor. These are matters which are treated extremely seriously by the British Government. They are treated extremely seriously by the international community. And I don't know any issue that has so united with the international community in condemnation because it is after all hurting the very substance, the very nature that makes Hong Kong so special.

Question: The ... channel of the British Government ...?

Governor: That is precisely what we have done. But I am not sure what it is that you are proposing. Can I just add one final point then I think you probably have enough to write about. It's sometime said, I think it has been said by an official today. I don't know why people are going so fuss about this. While the NPC may strike these laws down, what then happens is going to be left to the SAR government. Let me make these three points. First of all, how can you possibly pre-empt so in advance what the NPC and the Preparatory Committee are going to do? Has it been decided in advance? Secondly, if it is for the SAR, then why try to cook it in advance? Why try to determine what the SAR are going to do? And thirdly, which is the key question that any change which strikes these laws down and seeks to replace them with laws like those that were there before would be in contravention with the International Covenants and also any thing which amends the Bill of Rights in a way which has been proposed would weaken our civil liberties protection and which strike at the heart at the rule of law. Thanks very much.

End

Public hearing on Garley Building fire to start on Monday

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The Commission of Inquiry into the Garley Building Fire will conduct its first day of public hearing on Monday (February 3), in the commission's hearing room, 15th floor, Edinburgh Tower, The Landmark, Central, Hong Kong.

The hearing will start at 10 am and is expected to last until 4.30 pm.

The commission has sent out a provisional timetable for the first 19 days of the public hearing, which has included 91 witnesses, to parties who are involved in the inquiry and those who at the preliminary hearing held on January 16 indicated their interest to receive such a timetable.

The witnesses who are scheduled to appear before the commission in the first 10 days of the public hearing have been summoned to report to the commission on February 3.

End

44th Land and Building Advisory Committee Meeting

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The Land and Building Advisory Committee (LBAC) discussed the Long Term Housing Strategy Review report at its 44th meeting today (Thursday).

Chaired by Dr Cheng Hon-kwan, the Committee noted that the Long Term Housing Strategy Review consultative document was to provide a strategic direction for the housing policy of Hong Kong.

The Committee totally agreed that Government should increase the supply of flats to meet forecast demand for housing, in particular by providing a steady and sufficient supply of land.

"We also feel that Government should build more public rental blocks to meet the need of the lower income group. While we recognise the benefit of encouraging wider home ownership, we should ensure that adequate public rental housing is provided to those in genuine need," said Dr Cheng.

"Affordability is an important aspect. Rental of public housing and prices of flats under the home ownership scheme and sandwich class housing scheme must be set at a reasonable level which the public can afford," he added.

The Committee also discussed the trends of the property market in the second half of 1996.

"We are still concerned about the speculative activities in the luxury market which may spill over to the mass market. We noted that the developers have taken some measures to curb speculative activities carried out through shell companies. We have urged Government to closely monitor the effectiveness of these measures.

"Of course we have to be cautious in seeking a balance between curbing the speculative activities and avoiding interference to the free market," said Dr Cheng.

Another issue which was discussed was the measures and initiatives of the Buildings Department to enhance the maintenance and repairs arrangements of buildings.

The Committee is particularly concerned about structural safety of buildings and adequacy of fire escapes.

"We believe that it is the responsibility of owners of buildings to undertake preventive maintenance and timely repair. Government is now considering a Building Safety Inspection Scheme with options for voluntary adoption and mandatory application to achieve this goal," Dr Cheng said.

End

School bus escorts become mandatory

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The Transport Department announced today (Thursday) that mandatory provision of escorts on board school buses with a capacity of over 16 seats will take effect on Saturday (February 1).

This provision is for school buses carrying primary school and kindergarten children.

A spokesman for the department said: "School bus operators are required to nominate an escort for each of their school buses, and inform the Transport Department in a form."

An operator may call upon a replacement helper to render assistance if the nominee is not available.

"Operators are thus encouraged to draw up a list of possible replacement helpers, which may include, for instance, teachers or parents of the school children or their own relatives," the spokesman added.

"Such short-term helpers need not be registered with the department."

School bus operator will not be prohibited from making a trip if an escort fails to turn up and other helpers are not available.

"However, an operator should make every endeavour to find a replacement in the interest of the safety of the children on board," the spokesman said.

School bus operators will be given a six-month adaptation period to fine-tune their working arrangements.

The department will closely monitor the progress and liaise with the trade to help resolve problems which may arise.

Other additional safety measures which have been scheduled to take effect in February are being revised to take place in May upon the completion of the necessary legislative enactment process.

These measures include the mandatory installation of warning devices at main doors and emergency exit doors, an additional "Caution: Children" rear signboard on buses carrying school children and a new colour scheme for newly registered nanny vans.

End

External trade figures for December 1996 released

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In December 1996, the value of Hong Kong's re-exports and imports showed some increases over a year earlier. Domestic exports however continued to decline.

These are shown in the external trade figures for December 1996 released today (Thursday) by the Census and Statistics Department.

The value of total exports (comprising re-exports and domestic exports) in December 1996 increased by 1.2% over a year earlier to \$116.7 billion.

Within total exports, the value of re-exports increased by 3.5% to \$98.4 billion, but the value of domestic exports decreased by 9.6% to \$18.2 billion.

The value of imports increased by 2.9% in December 1996 over a year earlier to \$131.4 billion.

As the value of total exports in December 1996 was smaller than that of total imports, a visible trade deficit of \$14.7 billion, equivalent to 11% of the value of imports, was recorded. This was slightly greater than the corresponding deficit of \$12.4 billion, equivalent to 9.7% of the value of imports, in December 1995.

For 1996 as a whole, the value of total exports grew by 4%. Within this total, the value of re-exports rose by 6.6%, while that of domestic exports decreased by 8.4%. The value of imports showed an increase of 3%.

A visible trade deficit of \$137.7 billion, equivalent to 9% of the value of imports, was recorded in 1996. This was smaller than the deficit of \$147 billion, equivalent to 9.9% of the value of imports, recorded in 1995.

A government spokesman commented that export growth was considerably slower, along with greater volatility, in 1996 than in 1995.

In 1996, the slow-down in import demand in some of the major markets particularly the United States and China, the global oversupply of electronic products, the strength of the US dollar, and the on-going structural shift in the composition of Hong Kong's exports vis-à-vis offshore trading, all combined to restrain export growth.

Nevertheless, retained imports including those of capital goods and of raw materials and semi-manufactures recorded some increases in recent months.

This might suggest a possible pick-up in production for export in the months to come. Completion of the earlier inventory adjustment process in the local economy could have also contributed to a larger intake of imports.

A more detailed analysis of Hong Kong's external trade for December 1996, by commodity and country, will be released in mid-February.

Governor and FCO Minister visit Central and Western

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The Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, visited the Central and Western District today (Thursday) to see how people are preparing for the upcoming Lunar New Year.

He was joined by the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hanley; and the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Shelley Lau.

The party first toured the Caritas Social Centre for the Elderly at Caine Road, where they watched some senior citizens writing good luck "fai chuns", making lanterns and cutting paper silhouettes for decoration during the festive period. They also took an interest in the preparation of traditional food for the Spring Festival by a group of women.

They then went to the adjacent Caritas Lok Yau Early Education and Training Centre where a group of mentally disabled children were being taught to put coins into "laissee" packets.

After touring the Caritas facilities, they proceeded to the dried-seafood shops at Des Voeux Road West where they sampled some traditional foodstuffs used in celebrating the Lunar New Year.

The party then took a ride to The Peak by the Peak Tram. After taking a panoramic view of Central District and the West Kowloon reclamation area, they met some Central and Western District Board members and community leaders.

End

Walled village in Fanling declared a monument

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Lo Wai, a centuries-old walled village in Fanling, will be gazetted as a monument tomorrow (Friday) under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance.

This brings the total number of declared monuments in Hong Kong to 64.

Lo Wai was constructed as a village enclosed by brick walls on four sides. Its entrance tower has been relocated from the north to its present position in the east to improve "fung shui". The layout and most of the original walls of the village have been retained.

The village is the first of the five renowned walled villages (wais) in Lung Yeuk Tau established by the Tang clan whose ancestors branched from the main Tang settlement in Kam Tin in the 13th Century.

The other four "wais" are Mat Wat Wai, Tung Kok Wai, Wing Ning Wai and Kun Lung Wai (also known as Sun Wai).

The Tangs in Lung Yeuk Tau have claims to royal descent as one of their ancestors, Tang Wai-kap, married a Southern Song princess, Wong Koo (1127-1279). The soul tablet of the princess is still worshipped in the main ancestral hall, the Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall, in the village.

End

Regulation on whaling

The Whaling Industry (Regulation) Regulation, to be gazetted tomorrow (Friday), supplements the Whaling Industry (Regulation) Ordinance enacted on December 19, 1996 to localise UK laws giving whales protection from commercial whaling activities.

The Regulation sets out the conditions to be attached to a licence authorising the use of a ship or an aircraft registered in Hong Kong, or a factory situated in Hong Kong, for whaling activities. The conditions relate mainly to the keeping of operational records.

The Regulation also prescribes fees payable in connection with an application for a licence to conduct whaling activities.

The Regulation, which will be table in the Legislative Council on 5 February, 1997, completes the exercise to localise the relevant UK laws. There are no whaling activities in Hong Kong waters.

End

New Medical Council Chairman elected

The re-structured Medical Council of Hong Kong held its first meeting today (Thursday). At the meeting, Council members elected Professor Felice Lih-Mak to be the Council Chairman and the following Council members as Committee chairmen of the Council's five statutory committees respectively:

- * Dr Yeoh Eng-kiong (Licentiate Committee)
- * Professor Lee Shiu-hung (Education and Accreditation Committee)
- * Professor Leung Ping-chung (Ethics Committee)
- * Dr Yuen Chung-lau (Preliminary Investigation Committee)
- * Dr Lee Kin-hung (Health Committee)

End

Thirty-one Immigration staff receive commendation

The Director of Immigration, Mrs Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye, presented commendation certificates to 31 staff of the Immigration Department at a ceremony held in the department's headquarters today (Thursday).

Mrs Ip said the Immigration Department had experienced another very busy year in 1996 and passenger traffic at control points and workload at various offices were ever-increasing.

"With the joint effort of our uniformed and general grade staff, we have overcome many difficulties and maintained our quality service to the public," she added.

Congratulating the recipients of the commendation certificates, Mrs Ip said despite the exceedingly tight manpower resources, they had demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and morale, and exemplary devotion to the service.

Their outstanding performance had not only brought them personal pride and achievement, but also helped project a good image of the department, she said.

Among the 31 staff receiving commendation, Chief Immigration Officer (Special Duties), Mr Ho Kwok-wah, is commended for his outstanding leadership, initiative, perseverance, analytical power and planning and organisation skills in bringing the Immigration Control Automation System (ICAS) project to fruition.

End

Education chief shares views on teaching and learning

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The Director of Education, Mrs Helen C P Lai Yu, today (Thursday) shared her views with teachers and students on teaching and learning at the speech day of St Paul's Co-educational College.

"Teaching is a profession, a vocation and a mission and it is interesting, challenging and rewarding," Mrs Yu said.

She pointed out that teachers worked with young individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses.

"To understand and to get to know our students is often a complex task; to develop their talents and potential a long and, sometimes difficult, process.

"It is so rewarding to see our young grow and mature into responsible adults," she said.

Mrs Yu noted that learning was a life-long process and the best time for learning was when we were young.

Students should appreciate what they have and use their time and opportunity well.

They should learn not just in the classroom, but also through extra-curricular activities, she added.

End

Land Registry launches homepage

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The Land Registry (LR) will join the Internet from Saturday (February 1) to provide the public with direct access to information on the registry and its services.

Members of the public are invited to visit LR's homepage at <http://www.info.gov.hk/landreg/>.

The homepage will provide users with information on the registry's mission, objectives and visions, its organisation structure and a brief description of its services and fees.

Up-to-date monthly statistics on property transactions recorded by LR, and addresses and business hours of its various offices will also be available.

Comments and suggestions are welcome. They can be sent to the registry's electronic-mail address at lrinfo@landreg.gen.gov.hk.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority tender result

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Tender date	:	30 January 1997
Paper on offer	:	EF bills
Issue number	:	Q069
Issue date	:	31 January 1997
Maturity date	:	28 February 1997
Amount applied	:	HK\$16,325 MN
Amount allotted	:	HK\$5,000 MN
Average yield accepted	:	4.47 PCT
Highest yield accepted	:	4.50 PCT
Pro rata ratio	:	About 48 PCT
Average tender yield	:	4.62 PCT