



9 April 1997

DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

ISSUED BY GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES
GARDEN ROAD, 5th-8th FLOORS, MURRAY BUILDING,
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Dear DIB Clients

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It is the policy of this department that we should aim at running a paperless office in the long run, but if you have difficulties in the new arrangements, please contact the undersigned at 2842 8738.

Robert Yip
(Robert YIP)

for Director of Information Services

Return Slip

To : GIS, 8th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, Hong Kong
(Attn : Robert Yip)

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Wednesday, April 9, 1997

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Following is the transcript of the media session by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, after visiting the Tsuen Wan District this (Wednesday) afternoon:

Question: Were you reassured by Michael Suen's comments today?

Governor: I have read the consultation document and I hope that as many people as possible in Hong Kong will do so as well and will comment on it. I don't want to speak in detail about the document. We will, as you know, be publishing our own comments on the document which we will place in district offices alongside the consultation document itself, hoping that will contribute to the public debate.

But I do just want to make one point. When it was first proposed that some of Hong Kong's protection of civil liberties should be changed - in the words of the Chairman of the Bar Association, when these measures were proposed which would in her view undermine the rule of law - there was so much public disquiet expressed, that I think it was rightly decided that there should be a consultation process during which the community could make its views known. Now the question is this: Is this a genuine consultation process or is it not? The document doesn't set out options, it puts forward one set of proposals. And nowhere does it justify changing the present law. There is no indication, nor has there yet been any indication of how our present laws contravene in any way the Basic Law. But now we have got these proposals put forward without that justification, proposals which I think everybody knows to some extent turn the clock back on the freedoms which Hong Kong enjoys, and which undoubtedly tighten the screw on Hong Kong's civil liberties.

I hope that when people express their views on these issues they will be listened to. And I hope, as a demonstration that the consultation is genuine, that we can get a simple answer to this question: If people in Hong Kong make it clear that they don't want to have their existing protection of civil liberties changed on no grounds whatsoever, if the leaders of the legal profession and others speak out in those terms, can we have an assurance that the future government of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong will go to Peking and will go to the NPC and say, "We're sorry, but people in Hong Kong don't want to have their civil liberties protection changed; civil liberties protection which in their view is entirely in line not just with the International Covenants but with the Basic Law"?

So it is a simple question: If the consultation demonstrates, as previous comment has demonstrated, that people don't want a change in these fundamental freedoms, don't want a change in the law, can we be assured that that point will be put very clearly on behalf of Hong Kong to the authorities in Peking?

Question: But according to Michael Suen, he said that this is the reality that we must change the law. So what will the British Government do?

Governor: It is only the reality if you accept that with no justification whatsoever, the NPC can simply lay down the rules for Hong Kong; that we have no right to question why they are doing this. I repeat, they have at no stage pointed out in what ways Hong Kong's laws are in contravention of the Basic Law. They have never, ever done that.

Now the NPC is an important body. But the NPC is not Moses bringing the Tablets down from the top of the mountain. And if it is the case that as a result of this consultation people make it clear that they don't want a change in the law, then I hope the SAR Government-to-be will make that point to the NPC and to Peking. It is not enough to say, "We've got to do this because we've got to do this". It is a completely circular argument. If anybody, if any legal opinion could be produced to show that our existing laws contravene the Basic Law, then there might be an argument for change. But that has not been demonstrated and cannot be demonstrated.

Question: Concerning about the overseas funding, do you think it is a kind of restriction for the local party to survive because they don't have any funds to struggle for anything?

Governor: Well, one is aware, not least from looking at what happens in the United States, that apparently, foreign funding of political parties is something that happens in a lot of countries. But I don't want to get drawn into the detail of that argument at this stage. I notice that a lot of rather difficult questions have been asked about what exactly this would mean and how these rules could be applied. I don't actually think that the question of foreign influence on the political process in Hong Kong is terribly relevant to our lives here. We have vigorous, responsible political debate in Hong Kong; our own political parties jostling for position doing so in a much more moderate way than happens in other communities.

And that is something else that we have to remember when we consider these issues. When you go around Hong Kong do you get the impression that this is a community on the brink of social breakdown or chaos? Do you get the impression that the changes that have been made in our laws over the last few years have in some way undermined our stability or our prosperity? We have gone on getting more prosperous, we have remained an immensely stable society.

People talk about the increase in the number of demonstrations. There has been an increase in the number of demonstrations but they have been overwhelmingly peaceful, like the demonstrations you see today. Overwhelmingly peaceful, and they have been accompanied over the years by a fall in the level of crime in Hong Kong. There is less crime in Hong Kong today than there was in 1984 when the Joint Declaration was signed. So nobody can say that we have got to make these changes in the laws in order to hang on to our stability in this society.

I hear people talking about the importance of balancing individual aspirations with social order and the community good. We do that in Hong Kong. We do that in Hong Kong a lot more successfully than most other places in the region. What I fear is that if people seek to prevent their fellow citizens expressing their views in a vigorous but peaceful way, if they seek to choke-off political activity, it will produce the sort of social and political problems which they say they want to avoid.

This is a fantastically sophisticated and mature community. It is one of the most successful economies and societies in the world. Is it really our message to the world in 1997 that where everywhere else, almost everywhere else anyway, freedom is being enhanced, in Hong Kong we have got to edge back a bit from the freedoms we enjoy already? I don't think that is the message that Hong Kong should be sending out in 1997.

Question: ... SARCE office ... ?

Governor: Oh, that is a very, very simple point. We have not changed our views on this issue one iota, but we press for a consultation on this document and I don't want anybody to say that we have stood in the way of that consultation being as extensive as possible. I hope that people will read the document, I hope that they will read our commentary on it, I hope that they will listen to what people are saying, what political leaders are saying, what Mr Suen is saying, what I'm sure Mr Tung will say in due course. And I hope that they will then respond and set out their own views. I want this consultation to be a genuine one. And I repeat, there is no point in going through a consultation if people have made their mind up about the outcome. If the consultation shows what has already been demonstrated, that people don't want these changes in their laws, then I hope that point will be registered very clearly and firmly with the Chinese authorities. Thank you very much indeed.

End

Governor visits Tsuen Wan district

* * * * *

The Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, visited Tsuen Wan district to keep himself abreast of the latest developments in the district today (Wednesday) afternoon.

Accompanied by the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Shelley Lau; Tsuen Wan District Officer, Mr Gavin Ure; and Tsuen Wan District Board Chairman, Mr Chan Lau-fong, Mr Patten first proceeded to Tsuen Wan Lutheran School. It is a subsidised primary school with about 850 students, including a considerable number of new arrivals.

The Governor then toured Wo Yi Hop Village, established some 400 years ago in the foothills of Tai Mo Shan. The traditional village still retains a number of old village houses which sharply contrasted with some recent developments.

Mr Patten's next stop was an integrated youth service centre at Clague Garden Estate run by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups.

Before concluding the visit, the Governor met Tsuen Wan District Board members and local leaders at a community reception.

End

PDB to conduct Port Cargo Forecasts Exercise

* * * * *

The Port Development Board (PDB) today (Wednesday) signed a \$1.82 million contract with the GHK Hong Kong Ltd for carrying out a comprehensive consultancy study to update the Hong Kong's Port Cargo Forecasts.

Speaking after the contract signing ceremony, the Secretary of the Board, Mr Richard Yuen Ming-fai, said the consultant would assist the PDB Secretariat to review and update the last Port Cargo Forecasts prepared in 1995.

Mr Yuen said: "The Government's policy on port development is to match supply of port facilities with forecast demand, and it goes without saying that this policy is heavily dependent on reliable forecasts of future performance.

"We engage experienced and reputable international consultants to assist us in undertaking a major review of the Port Cargo Forecasts once every two years to ensure that these forecasts, which span up to 20 years ahead, are as accurate and up to date as possible.

"These forecasts will provide crucial data for carrying out realistic and accurate planning for future port facilities and the provision of port-related infrastructure. Our ability to provide new port facilities to match demand is vital to support Hong Kong's economic growth; to enable us to continue to maintain our position as the largest and main port for Southern China; to create employment in the port and other related economic activities such as transportation, shipping, import and export trade, banking and insurance, etc.; and to maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness as a major international port in the light of growing competition in the region," he said.

Mr Yuen said that the port is Hong Kong's only natural resources, apart from its people, and the two together have made us one of the most successful economies in the world. Hong Kong owes its existence to the port and the port remains one of the most important service sectors of our economy.

He said: "We must continue to develop our strength and develop our port if Hong Kong is to continue to grow and prosper. The study would take into account changing world and regional economic conditions, new trends in cargo movement and competing port developments in the region.

"The fact that we appoint a consultant to assist us is to stress the importance we attach to professionalism and impartiality in undertaking the study. The port and shipping industry will be fully consulted in the study. We will also make use of the opportunity to obtain and exchange information with port authorities in China and in the region to share our views on market projections and new port developments and to assess their implications for our future port development plans. The forecasts would be used to determine the territory's long-term need for new container terminals and other cargo handling facilities to meet demand."

The study, which starts today, is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

End

WSD's meter testing laboratory awarded accreditation

* * * * *

The Meter Testing Laboratory of the Water Supplies Department has formally been accepted by the Hong Kong Accreditation Scheme (HOKLAS) as an accredited laboratory in recognition of its competence to carry out water meter tests.

"The accreditation is a big step forward to accomplish the department's vision and mission in the provision of quality services to six million Hong Kong people," the Director of Water Supplies, Mr Hu Man-shiu said today (Wednesday).

Speaking at the celebration ceremony held at the Lung Cheung Road Mechanical and Electrical Workshop where the laboratory was located, Mr Hu said: "It is a driving force for every body in the department to conduct and maintain an ever-improving quality assurance system in the water meter testing and hence further enhance our consumers' confidence in our services."

Under the calibration services category, the accreditation covers the accuracy test on 15 mm water meters which are used by over 98 per cent of consumers in Hong Kong to measure their water consumption.

The Meter Testing Laboratory conducts meter testing in accordance with the procedures required under International Standard Organisation (ISO) 4064.

Accreditation was awarded after the laboratory had been thoroughly assessed and proved to be technically competent in performing the meter accuracy test.

Details of the accredited tests are included in the HOKLAS Directory of Accredited Laboratories under registration number 74.

"Accuracy and reliability of measurements are achieved by the implementation of a stringent laboratory quality assurance system, by using properly calibrated equipment and by employing competent personnel," Mr Hu added.

HOKLAS was formally established by the Government in May 1985 to officially identify and recognise testing laboratories which are competent to carry out specific types of tests or measurements.

End

Local Student Finance Scheme invites applications

* * * * *

The Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) which administers the Government's Local Student Finance Scheme (LSFS) announces the arrangements for applications in respect of the 1997-98 academic year today (Wednesday).

The LSFS is a means-tested scheme, which provides financial assistance in the form of grant and/or loan to needy students attending full-time recognized courses at the City University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Lingnan College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Technical College (Chai Wan), the Hong Kong Technical College (Tsing Yi), the Prince Philip Dental Hospital (for students studying the course leading to Diploma in Dental Technology only), and the Hong Kong Institute of Education (for students studying full-time pre-service two-year to three-year courses or other full-time recognized courses.)

Applicants must either have the right of abode in Hong Kong or have resided or have had their homes in Hong Kong continuously for three completed years immediately prior to the commencement of their courses.

Current students may obtain application forms from their respective institutions. New students admitted by the above mentioned Universities and Colleges may obtain application forms from the institutions concerned at the time of registration.

Students should submit their applications to the SFAA via their respective institutions. Applicants whose sibling(s) is/are also applying for the LSFS (1997-98) at the same time should hand in their applications, together with those of their siblings, to the institutions of either of the siblings.

Applicants who wish to apply for Student Travel Subsidy should do so by completing the appropriate section in the same application form.

Completed applications should be returned to the applicant's institution before the deadlines as specified below:-

Current students: 30 April 1997

(The deadline for current students of the Hong Kong Institute of Education is 14 June 1997)

New students

1. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: 12 September 1997
2. Lingnan College: 26 September 1997
3. Hong Kong Baptist University: 26 September 1997
4. City University of Hong Kong: 26 September 1997
5. Hong Kong Polytechnic University: 9 October 1997
6. Prince Philip Dental Hospital: 15 October 1997
7. Hong Kong Institute of Education: 31 October 1997
8. Hong Kong Technical College (Tsing Yi): 24 October 1997

9. Hong Kong Technical College (Chai Wan): 24 October 1997
10. Chinese University of Hong Kong: the Secondary Friday after the commencement of the first semester (1997-98)
11. University of Hong Kong: 21 days from the date of offer of admission
12. For postgraduate (by research) students newly enrolled to their courses in 1997/98: the deadline is one month from the date of commencement of course (in any case not later than end of March 1998)

Financial assistance for applicants is assessed on the basis of their family income less permitted deductions and divided by number of family members to arrive at their annual disposable income, which will then determine their grant/loan entitlements. Applicants whose family assets exceed a set limit will have their assistance reduced.

If necessary, the applicant and/or an adult member of his/her household who is fully aware of the family's circumstances will be invited to attend an interview at the SFAA to clarify information reported in the application.

Applicants should ensure that all supporting documents are attached to their application forms. Applications not duly completed or without full set of supporting documentary proofs may not be processed so expeditiously.

The Agency's spokesman sounds a special note of warning that incorrect or inaccurate information provided in applications will not only lead to their rejection but may also give rise to criminal proceedings against the applicants and/or his/her parents. Recently, an applicant's mother was convicted for failing to provide true and complete information. She was fined \$6,500 and two months' imprisonment which was suspended for 12 months.

Enquiries should be directed to the SFAA at 9th floor National Mutual Centre, 151 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong (Telephone No.: 2802 1666). Public may also make use of the automated enquiry telephone hotline 2802 2345 to gather further information on the Scheme.

End

Counselling session for fire victims

* * * * *

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) will hold a counselling session on Saturday (April 12) to help those affected by the Mei Foo Sun Chuen fire overcome their stress problems.

The session will take place at the Mei Foo Community Hall, Mei Foo Sun Chuen, at 2.30 pm.

The department's clinical psychologists will be deployed to provide critical incident stress debriefing to victims and family members distressed by the fire.

Members of the public who witnessed the tragedy or have any distress problems resulted from the fire are also welcome to attend.

Meanwhile, SWD caseworkers have contacted the families of all eight deceased to see what kind of services they needed.

Staff of the department will liaise with the families of all victims regarding payments of burial grants and injury grants from the Emergency Relief Fund.

End

Seminars on extra-curricular activities guidelines

* * * * *

Primary and secondary school heads are invited to nominate teachers to attend seminars on "Guidelines on Extra-curricular Activities in Schools" to be held on May 20 and May 21 at the Hong Kong Teachers' Centre.

The seminars are jointly organised by the Education Department and the Hong Kong Extra-curricular Activities Coordinators' Association.

The two identical half-day seminars aim at enhancing schools' understanding of the issue; providing up-to-date information on extra-curricular activities; and providing participants with opportunities to exchange views and experiences.

Subsequent to the release of the "Draft Guidelines on Extra-activities in Schools" in October 1996 for consultation, a considerable amount of feedback was received.

These comments were considered and incorporated as appropriate in the consolidated version of the guidelines.

The guidelines aim to better teachers' understandings of the extra-curricular activities from a broad perspective.

A circular and three sets of guidelines had been issued to all primary and secondary schools.

Completed nomination forms have to be returned to the School Activities Section of the Education Department's Advisory Inspectorate Division at Room 934, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, or fax it to 2893 3747, on or before April 30.

All applications will be processed on a first-come-first-served basis. Successful candidates will be notified by mail on or before May 12.

Enquiries should be directed to the above section on 2892 6693.

End

Marine Department is co-ordinating rescue operation

* * * * *

The Maritime Rescue Co-ordinating Centre (MRCC) of the Marine Department is co-ordinating a rescue operation of a collision incident involving a high-speed ferry and a towing vessel.

The incident was reported that a Zhuhai-bound high-speed ferry "Hoi Bin" had a collision with a towing vessel off Shek Kwu Chau this (Wednesday) morning.

Initial report indicated that there are 194 passengers and eight crew members on board the high-speed ferry and no casualty and injuries have so far been reported.

Meanwhile, Marine Department vessels and Police launches are rushing to the scene to assist.

End

Probe into vessel collision being conducted

* * * * *

The Marine Department is investigating a collision involving a catamaran and a kaito off Shek Kwu Chau this (Wednesday) morning.

Zhuhai-bound catamaran "Hoi Bin" with 193 passengers and eight crew members on board collided with a kaito west of Shek Kwu Chau around 10 am this morning.

A hole measuring two metres by 1.5 metres was made on the catamaran's starboard bow above the waterline.

The passengers and crew members of the catamaran sustained no injuries in the accident.

A total of 188 passengers were transferred to another catamaran despatched to the scene by the shipping company to continue their voyage to Zhuhai.

The remaining five passengers who chose to return to Hong Kong will be taken by a Police launch to China Ferry Terminal later today.

The kaito had two crew members and three passengers on board. The master sustained slight injury and was subsequently admitted to Cheung Chau Hospital for treatment and observation.

End

Last Royal Navy base in Far East decommissions

* * * * *

HMS Tamar, the Royal Navy's last shore establishment in the Far East, decommissions on Friday (April 11), exactly 100 years to the day that a vessel of that name first arrived in Hong Kong waters as an accommodation ship.

Over 200 sailors will parade in front of the quarter deck at HMS Tamar, on Stonecutters Island, as the White Ensign is lowered for the last time, bringing to an end a 156-year-long association between the Royal Navy and the territory.

Among those attending the ceremony will be the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, Commander British Forces Major General Bryan Dutton, Senior Naval Officer and Chief of Staff Commodore Peter Melson, and First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Jock Slater, who has flown in from the United Kingdom especially for the occasion.

Music for the ceremony will be provided by the Band of the Royal Marines, who are based at Portsmouth in the south of England, and who are currently enjoying a short tour of the territory.

The first naval officer to set foot in Hong Kong was probably the commanding officer of HMS Sulphur, Sir Edward Belcher, who landed on January 25, 1841 and drank Her Majesty's health on Possession Mount, near the present day Hollywood Road. The following day, the Colony was formally claimed by Commodore Sir Gordon Bremer and the Union flag was raised for the first time.

HMS Tamar, a name synonymous with the China Station, first arrived in Hong Kong on April 11, 1897. The fourth ship of this name, she was secured to a buoy in Victoria Harbour and then moved along side the west wall of the newly reclaimed dockyard in 1913, where she remained until the Second World War. When it became clear that Hong Kong would fall to the Japanese in December 1941 she was scuttled, a sad end to an unglamorous career.

The new HMS Tamar, and fifth in line, was commissioned in 1946 and between 1959 and 1962 a modern naval base was established between Harcourt Road and the waterfront. The continuing reclamation of the north shores of Hong Kong Island, including the former Victoria Basin, necessitated the relocation of the Royal Navy's shore establishment to Stonecutters Island in May 1993 from where it has since operated, in support of the three ships of the Hong Kong Squadron. HMS Tamar is commanded by Lieutenant Commander Cliff Squibb.

The Hong Kong Squadron will remain on duty in Hong Kong waters up to, and including, June 30, 1997, supported by a rationalised naval operational unit. Once their duties in the territory are completed the three patrol craft will be sold, subject to negotiation, to the Philippines.

End



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(Robert YIP)

for Director of Information Services

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SUPPLEMENT

Wednesday, April 9, 1997

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Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No.2) Bill 1997

* * * * *

Following is the speech by the Attorney General, Mr Jeremy Mathews, in moving the second reading of the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No.2) Bill 1997 in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Administration of Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Bill 1997 be read the second time. The Bill aims to make provision in local legislation for the retirement and resignation of Supreme Court judges and District Judges. The opportunity is also taken to make a number of technical amendments relating to the administration of oaths of office to avoid problems that would otherwise arise on and after 1 July 1997. I shall now outline the main provisions of the Bill.

First, the present provisions for the retirement and resignation of Supreme Court judges and District Judges are contained in Article XVIA(1), (2) and (3) of the Letters Patent. As the Letters Patent will cease to apply to Hong Kong after 30 June 1997, these provisions need to be incorporated into local legislation. Clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill amend the Supreme Court Ordinance and the District Court Ordinance respectively to incorporate the provisions currently in the Letters Patent.

Secondly, section 17 of the Oaths and Declarations Ordinance provides that all judges and judicial officers specified in the Third Schedule to the Ordinance shall take the Oath of Allegiance and the Judicial Oath as soon as possible after their appointment. There is, however, no provision at present for a Justice of Appeal to take such oaths after appointment. As Justices of Appeal will need to take oaths following their appointment to the Judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, clause 7 amends Part 1 of the Third Schedule to provide that a Justice of Appeal should also take the oaths after appointment.

Thirdly, section 7 of the Judicial Service Commission Ordinance states that members of the Commission shall on first appointment take an oath of office administered by a judge. The Judicial Service Commission will be retitled the Judicial Officers Recommendation Commission on 1 July and new appointments will be made to the Commission. When it holds its first meeting on 1 July 1997 to recommend the appointment of the Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, no judges will have been appointed in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. A practical solution is required for this practical problem. In order to facilitate the administering of the oath of office to members of the Commission at that meeting and on future occasions, clause 8 amends section 7 of the Ordinance to enable a commissioner for oaths, in addition to a judge, to administer the oath.

Fourthly, clauses 2, 5 and 6 contain consequential amendments to the Supreme Court Ordinance, the Pension Benefits (Judicial Officers) Ordinance and the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance respectively.

Mr President, I commend the Bill to this Council for early passage into law.

End

Transfer of Sentenced Persons Bill: second reading

* * * * *

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in moving the second reading of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Bill in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Bill be read a second time.

Transfer of sentenced persons is an important area of international co-operation in law enforcement. The purpose of transferring sentenced persons to their own countries to serve their custodial sentences is to facilitate their rehabilitation, by returning them to an environment free of language and cultural barriers and where their friends and relatives can visit them on a regular basis.

Hong Kong's arrangements for the transfer of sentenced persons are at present provided for by the Council of Europe Convention in relation to the Transfer of Sentenced Persons and the UK/Thailand Agreement in relation to the Transfer of Offenders. These agreements signed by the UK have been extended to Hong Kong but they cannot continue to apply to Hong Kong after 30 June 1997. With the agreement of the Chinese side in the Joint Liaison Group, we are establishing our own bilateral arrangements with other jurisdictions for the transfer of sentenced persons which will remain in force beyond 30 June 1997. However, we cannot bring any of our new bilateral arrangements into operation until there is an implementing legislation.

The main purpose of the Bill is to provide the appropriate legal framework to enable Hong Kong to implement our new Transfer of Sentenced Persons (TSP) agreements with other jurisdictions. Without this legislation, it will not be possible for Hong Kong to transfer sentenced persons to and from Hong Kong in accordance with the new TSP agreements after 30 June 1997. Nor, equally important, will we be able to continue the detention of prisoners who have already been transferred pursuant to the existing arrangements.

The proposed legislation follows broadly the UK legislation which is currently applied in Hong Kong. Key features of the legislation include

- both the receiving and sending jurisdictions as well as the sentenced person must consent to the transfer;
- the conduct in respect of which the sentenced person is imprisoned must be criminal in both jurisdictions; and
- any adjustment to the sentence by the sending jurisdiction (for example, by way of pardon, reduction of sentence) must be given effect to by the receiving jurisdiction.

The Chinese side of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group confirmed agreement to the localising Bill at JLG XXXIX held on 21 March this year. We need now to ensure that the localized legislation can take effect as soon as possible before the handover. I therefore urge Honourable Members' urgent consideration and support for the Bill. The early enactment of the Bill would enhance the international community's confidence in the continuity of the rule of law in Hong Kong and our criminal justice system. It will also be of benefit to the prisoners affected.

Thank you, Mr President.

End

Auxiliary Medical Service Bill: second reading

* * * * *

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in moving the second reading of the Auxiliary Medical Service Bill in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Auxiliary Medical Service Bill be read a second time.

I will also introduce the Civil Aid Service Bill, which is very similar to the Auxiliary Medical Service Bill, to Honourable Members later today.

The two Bills seek to introduce updated legislation for the Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS) and the Civil Aid Service (CAS) to reflect their modern functions.

The Essential Services Corps Ordinance was enacted in 1949. The main objective of the Ordinance and its subsidiary legislation was to establish units of trained persons capable of assisting in the Government's response to natural disasters or other emergencies. The AMS Unit was established in 1950, and the CAS Unit was established in 1952 both under this Ordinance.

At its inception, the AMS was intended essentially as a standby medical unit for emergencies whilst the CAS mainly carried out civil defence duties. With the passage of time, the units have expanded their activities into non-disaster related areas. They provide supplementary resources to augment the regular forces, both in times of emergency and in other situations.

The Essential Services (AMS) Corps Regulations and the Essential Services (CAS) Corps Regulations are too generalised for the requirements of today. They do not describe the current operational functions of the AMS and CAS; nor do they provide for the training and other activities of their members and cadets. We therefore propose to introduce separate and updated legislation for the Services.

The purpose of the two Bills is to provide for the establishment of the AMS and the CAS in order to replace the AMS Unit and the CAS Unit currently established under the Essential Services (AMS) Corps Regulations and the Essential Services (CAS) Corps Regulations respectively. The provisions of the Bills include the constitution and functions of the Services, calling out and performance of voluntary duties, disciplinary matters, and the establishment of the AMS Cadet Corps and the CAS Cadet Corps.

The Legislative Council Panel on Security was briefed on 2 December 1996, and supported the proposal to introduce separate legislation for the AMS and the CAS. Early enactment of the Bills will be welcomed by members of the AMS and the CAS, who have contributed, and will continue to do so in the future, so much in support of the regular forces' efforts to maintain public order and safety of the community.

I urge Honourable Members to give the Bills speedy consideration.

Thank you, Mr President.

End

Civil Aid Service Bill: seconding reading

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Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in moving the second reading of the Civil Aid Service Bill in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Civil Aid Service Bill be read a second time.

This Bill is very similar to the Auxiliary Medical Service Bill which I have introduced to Honourable Members earlier. It seeks to introduce updated legislation for the Civil Aid Service (CAS) to reflect its modern functions. The key features of this Bill have been explained in my speech on the Auxiliary Medical Service Bill.

The CAS has done and will continue to do much to augment the regular forces to benefit our community. I urge Honourable Members to give this Bill speedy consideration.

Thank you, Mr President.

End

Merchant Shipping (Collision Damage Liability & Salvage) Bill

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Following is a speech by the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Stephen Ip, in moving the second reading of the Merchant Shipping (Collision Damage Liability and Salvage) Bill, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Merchant Shipping (Collision Damage Liability and Salvage) Bill be read a second time.

The Bill has two main purposes. It seeks to localise part of the UK Maritime Conventions Act 1911 and to extend to Hong Kong the new International Convention on Salvage 1989 which came into force last year.

The UK Maritime Conventions Act 1911 currently extends to Hong Kong two international conventions: the International Convention on Collision Damage Liability and the International Convention on Salvage 1910. However, since the International Convention on Salvage has been replaced by a new Convention in 1989, the Bill seeks only to localise that part of the UK Act which deals with the International Convention on Collision Damage Liability and to replace those provisions in the Act relating to the 1910 Convention on Salvage by the 1989 Convention.

To implement the International Convention on Collision Damage Liability, clauses 3 to 7 of the Bill set out the rules on the division of loss in cases of damage or loss caused by the fault of two or more vessels, and the rules on the liability of the owners of the vessels which caused the loss of life or personal injuries. The general principle, provided by the International Convention, is that the liability of the owners of the vessels involved shall be in proportion to the degree in which each vessel was in fault.

Clause 9 of the Bill seeks to implement the International Convention on Salvage 1989 to Hong Kong. The text of the new Convention is set out in Schedule 1 to the Bill. It stipulates the duties of the salvor, the owner and the master during the course of a salvage operation. It also requires every shipmaster to render assistance to any person in danger of being lost at sea. To implement this requirement of the Convention, the Bill makes it an offence for any shipmaster to fail to render assistance so far as he can do so without serious danger to his ship and persons thereon.

The Convention also stipulates the rights of salvors and the conditions for reward to salvors. Generally speaking, a salvor is rewarded only if the salvage operation is successful. Under the 1989 Convention, exceptions can be made if a salvor fails to save the ship and the cargo but helps to prevent or minimise damage to the environment - by, say, towing a damaged ship away from an environmentally sensitive area. In such cases, the salvor will be entitled to a special compensation. The objective of this provision is to give incentive to the salvage industry to help limit the environmental damage even though the chances of salvaging the ship or the cargo are slim.

As a major international shipping centre, we must follow the international rules and practice in dealing with collision damage liability and salvage operation. The enactment of this Bill is important to ensure that these two international maritime conventions will continue to apply to Hong Kong after 1 July.

Mr President, with these words I commend the Bill to this Council.

End

Suicide rate of the elderly

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Allen Lee Peng-fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

According to a survey conducted by the University of Hong Kong, the suicide rate of the elderly in Hong Kong ranks second in the world. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the following:

- (a) the number of elderly persons who had committed suicide in the past five years together with a breakdown of these elderly persons by age and sex;
- (b) the causes of the elderly suicides and the means by which such suicide were committed; and
- (c) the measures adopted by the Government to reduce the occurrence of suicide cases involving elderly persons?

Reply:

- (a) The known suicide death figures of persons aged 65 and above by age and sex in the past 5 years are as follows:

Sex	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Male	101	106	98	121	116
Female	86	109	101	102	94
Total	187	215	199	223	210

It is understood that the study which Hon Allen Lee refers to in his question is the one commissioned by Befrienders International. In their report published in February 1997, it is mentioned that the data on the international comparison of elderly suicide should be interpreted with care as they refer to different years and there may be differences in the age and gender distribution of the elderly population of the countries being compared. It is therefore difficult to derive a firm conclusion from the data highlighted in the study that Hong Kong's elderly suicide rate is amongst the highest in the world.

- (b) Suicide is a very complex problem. It is caused by a variety of reasons, including social, psychological, emotional and situational factors. Prolonged illness, death of a loved one, family troubles, frustrations, despair and hopelessness are often the reasons cited for suicide attempts by elderly persons. The suicidal act is usually the climax of a crisis in an individual. No single or simple explanation can cover the wide range of situations that lead to suicide.

The means by which suicide were committed among the total deaths of persons aged 65 and above in 1995 are as follows:

(Suicide and self-inflicted injury)
Total deaths by cause of death, 1995 (Aged 65+)

Cause	Male	Female	Total
Suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances	3	9	12
Suicide and self-inflicted injury by hanging, strangulation and suffocation	51	27	78
Suicide and self-inflicted injury by jumping from high place	55	54	109
Others	7	4	11
Total	116	94	210

- (c) Suicide may be prevented if the elderly persons have a more positive outlook and better control of their life. When they are confronted with personal difficulties, it would be most important if their family members can render them with strong emotional support. To supplement family support, it is Government's policy to create strong community support network to help to address problems of loneliness and depression faced by some elderly people, especially those in crisis. Services being provided include the following:

(i) Services to promote an active lifestyle

In 1996/97, there are 196 social centres and 27 multi-services centres for the elderly which offer activities to meet the social and recreational needs of the elderly and to encourage elderly people to widen their social circle. Multi-service centres for the elderly also provide community education programmes to help elderly persons understand various changes accompanying the aging process and face them in a positive manner. In districts where elderly population congregate, Family Life Education workers will include the elderly people as target participants of their programmes. In particular, the elderly people are encouraged to maintain an active life style irrespective of whether they are economically active.

(ii) Support services for elderly at risk

There are 65 Family Services Centres and 344 Medical Social Services Units to assist the needy including elderly people to solve their problems. Furthermore, Clinical Psychology Units and counselling unit of multi-service centres for the elderly of the Social Welfare Department, non-governmental organisations and Hospital Authority provide counselling services to elderly persons facing problems or in crisis. In addition, the Department of Health has introduced a pilot Elderly Health Service which places emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention. Clients are encouraged to attend health promotion activities and to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Clients are also provided with annual physical examinations and health screenings for chronic diseases including depressions. Elderly with symptoms of suicidal tendency will be promptly referred to hospitals.

(iii) Outreaching services for elderly at risk

Where necessary, caseworkers of Family Services Centres and Medical Social Workers will reach out to the elderly people who are in need of assistance and support. The Community Geriatric Assessment Teams and Psychogeriatric Teams also reach out to elderly persons in the community who are in need of assessments and/or medical treatments.

The experimental Volunteer Workers Programme, Older Volunteers Programme and Social Networking for the Elderly also bring in the concept of using volunteers to widen the support network and to identify elderly at risk. Elderly people identified to be in need of professional services will be referred to the appropriate unit for follow-up.

End

Lantau Link opening ceremony

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Following is a question by the Hon Lo Suk-ching and a written reply by the Secretary for Works, Mr Kwong Hon-sang, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is learnt that the Government will organise a fireworks display and other large-scale public activities on 27 April this year to celebrate the opening of the Lantau Link. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether the Government has consulted the public before deciding to organise the fireworks display and other activities mentioned above; if not, why not;
- (b) of the estimated amount of public money which the Government has to spend in organising the fireworks display despite private sponsorship for the event, bearing in mind that the Government departments concerned (including the Home Affairs Department, the Marine Department, the Police, the New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office and the Transport Department) have to deploy staff to undertake co-ordination work as well as to maintain public order and regulate traffic flow; and whether the Government has assessed if the expenditure involved is 'money well spent' when deciding to organise such activities;

- (c) of the total number of celebration activities organised by the Government to mark the opening of the Lantau Link, as well as the specific plan and estimated number of participants in respect of each activity;
- (d) of the specific plans drawn up by the Government concerning the security and traffic control measures to be adopted in connection with the activities mentioned in the answer to (c) above; and whether the extent of nuisance that may be caused to the public has been fully considered while formulating such plans;
- (e) apart from providing entertainment to the public, of the other reasons, including political reasons, for organising the fireworks display and other large-scale public activities to mark the opening of a highway?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Lantau Link Opening Ceremony is part of a series of ceremonies marking the completion of each of the five projects which form the transport corridor of the Airport Core Programme (ACP) running from Central District to Tung Chung New Town. The specific answers to the question are as follows:

- (a) The application for the staging of a fireworks display as part of the Ceremony was approved after having taken into account a number of factors including likely public reaction and safety requirements. When the proposal was first submitted to Government, the Administration's assessment was that this would be acceptable to the community as a whole, subject to satisfactory arrangements being worked out on crowd control, traffic arrangements, and transport facilities in consultation with relevant District Boards and affected local residents.

We started our consultation on a preliminary proposal on crowd control, traffic, and public transport arrangements in early March. So far, three District Boards and the Airport Consultative Committee have been consulted. The general feeling was supportive of the display and specific proposals had been made to improve on the preliminary proposal. We plan to finalize the detailed arrangements in mid April in the light of the views collected during the consultation exercise.

- (b) For the Lantau Link Opening Ceremony, the New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office (NAPCO) is co-ordinating the preparation work. Direct expenses for the Ceremony are in the region of \$7.5 million. These will come out of the funds approved for publicity and public relations for the Airport Core Programme. Staff costs are absorbed by Government departments within their current strength and various participating organisations. The fireworks display, at a cost of \$5 million, is sponsored by a commercial enterprise.

Considering the opportunity offered for promoting our international image in being able to complete a substantial part of one of the largest infrastructural projects in the world ahead of schedule and below budget during the final years of transition, and for enhancement of our status as a service centre for infrastructural development and project management, we consider the efforts and resources put in organizing these events very good value for money.

- (c) With the objectives of drawing international and local attention to the completion of the ACP transportation network on time and within budget, and of encouraging community participation in celebrating the completion of a new Hong Kong landmark, NAPCO has been working with various Government departments and organisations on a series of events/activities to mark the opening of the Lantau Link:

- (i) a formal opening ceremony of the Lantau Link on 27 April 1997, preceded by land parade, boat flotilla and flypast and followed by car procession and fireworks display;
- (ii) an international marathon on the Lantau Link and North Lantau Expressway together with a 10-km running event on 4 May 1997; and
- (iii) a Community Chest charity walk along Route 3 and the Lantau Link on 11 May 1997.

Whilst our target is to enable as many people to participate as practically feasible, it is difficult to estimate the precise number of people taking part in these activities. Many factors, such as weather and other attractive events held elsewhere, may well affect the actual number of participants. The following is a rough estimate:

- (i) some 2,400 (1,200 invited guests and 1,200 participants/performers) for the Lantau Link Opening Ceremony and 300,000 spectators who are expected to view the fireworks display along Castle Peak Road;

- (ii) around 7,500 participants for the running events; and
- (iii) up to 80,000 participants for the charity walk.
- (d) Events on the Lantau Link will be held before it is open to public traffic. While these events themselves do not take away available road space, traffic diversions on the approach roads are sometimes necessary because of the need to facilitate crowd and traffic control. There will also be additional need on public transport arrangements. In the case of the Lantau Link Opening Ceremony, pedestrianisation of certain sections of Castle Peak Road as well as regulation of traffic during the fireworks display along Tuen Mun Road is required. Some inconvenience to affected residents nearby is therefore unavoidable.

Government departments, in particular the Police Force, Transport Department, Marine Department and Fire Services Department, are working together with the organisers concerned to ensure that any inconvenience to affected residents is kept to the absolute minimum. At the same time, special attention will be paid to public safety, expeditious dispersal of crowd, effective crowd control, and the valuable lessons learnt during the New Year Eve fireworks display at Tuen Mun. As soon as views on the preliminary proposal put forth to relevant District Boards have been collected and examined, we will announce the details in mid April.

- (e) Apart from providing an opportunity for the whole community to celebrate the completion of the Lantau Link, our new landmark with the world's longest road and rail carrying suspension bridge, and the objectives mentioned in the response to question (b) above, there is no other reason whatsoever in organizing the various events related to the opening of the Lantau Link.

End

Sixty estates built on newly reclaimed land

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Following is a question by the Hon Ngan Kam-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In the light of the subsidence in Yau Oi Estate in Tuen Mun, does the Government know:

- (a) of the public rental housing (PRH) estates and Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) estates under the management of the Housing Authority which are situated on newly reclaimed land at present;
- (b) whether the Housing Department (HD) has carried out periodic inspections on the PRH estates and HOS estates mentioned in the answer to (a) above, and whether the HD has earmarked funds for tackling subsidence cases that may occur; why not; and
- (c) whether, apart from the subsidence in Yau Oi Estate, the HD has come across subsidence cases in other PRH estates and HOS estates in the past three years; if so, of the number of such cases in each of the three years as well as the names of the PRH estates and HOS estates concerned?

Answer:

Mr President,

There are 60 estates constructed on newly reclaimed land: 24 public rental housing (PRH) estates, 23 Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) estates and 13 Private Sector Participation Scheme (PSPS) estates. Details are at the attached table.

Reclaimed land is subject to settlement. This is allowed for in the design and construction stage of Housing Authority estates. Subsequent soil subsidence should not affect the structural safety of these buildings.

The structural condition of PRH and HOS estates managed by the Housing Department is regularly inspected by professional staff. PSPS and HOS estates managed by private agencies are inspected by qualified people concerned.

For PRH estates, expenditure relating to remedial work as a result of subsidence is met from the Housing Department's funds for general maintenance and repair. For HOS and PSPS estates, such expenditure is charged to the maintenance and repair accounts of the management funds of individual estates.

In the past three years, apart from the incident at Yau Oi Estate, there have been two other cases of ground subsidence in On Ning Garden (Tseung Kwan O) and Siu Hei Court (Tuen Mun).

List of completed estates constructed on newly reclaimed land
位於新填海區房屋委員會轄下公共屋邨和居屋屋苑

Area 地點	Public Rental Housing (PRH) Estates 租住公屋邨	Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) Estates 居者有其屋屋苑	Private Sector Participation Scheme (PSPS) Estates 私人機構參建居屋屋苑
Chai Wan (柴灣)	Tsui Wan Estate (翠灣邨) Yue Wan Estate (漁灣邨)	Yee Tsui Court (怡翠苑)	Cheerful Garden (奮怡花園) Walton Estate (宏德居)
Aberdeen (香港仔)	Wah Kwai Estate (華貴邨)	Ka Lung Court (嘉隆苑)	
Lantau Island (大嶼山)	Lung Tin Estate (龍田邨)		
Ma On Shan (馬鞍山)	Chung On Estate (頌安邨) Heng On Estate (恆安邨) Yiu On Estate (耀安邨)	Kam Fung Court (錦豐苑) Kam Hay Court (錦禧苑) Kam On Court (錦鞍苑)	Fok On Garden (福安花園) Fu Fai Garden (富輝花園)
Sha Tin (沙田)	Wo Che Estate (和壺邨)	Yue Tin Court (愉玉苑)	
Sham Shui Po (深水埗)	Nam Cheong Estate (南昌邨)		
Tai Po (大埔)	Fu Shin Estate (富善邨) Kwong Fuk Estate (廣福邨) Tai Yuen Estate (大元邨)	Ming Nga Court (明雅苑) Ting Nga Court (汀雅苑) Wang Fuk court (宏福苑) Yee Nga Court (怡雅苑)	Sun Hing Garden (新興花園) Tai Po Plaza (大埔廣場)
Tsing Yi (青衣)	Cheung Fat Estate (長發邨) Cheung On Estate (長安邨)	Ching Nga Court (菁雅苑) Ching Tai Court (青泰苑)	Serene Garden (海悅花園)
Tseung Kwan O (將軍澳)	Hau Tak Estate (厚德邨) King Lam Estate (景林邨) Ming Tak Estate (明德邨) Po Lam Estate (寶林邨)	Chung Ming Court (頌明苑) Hin Ming Court (顯明苑) Ho Ming Court (浩明苑) Yan Ming Court (欣明苑) Ying Ming Court (英明苑) Yu Ming Court (裕明苑) Yuk Ming Court (煜明苑)	Fu Ning Garden (富寧花園) On Ning Garden (安寧花園)
Tuen Mun (屯門)	Butterfly Estate (蝴蝶邨) On Ting Estate (安定邨) Sam Shing Estate (三聖邨) San Fat Estate (新發邨) Wu King Estate (湖景邨) Yau Oi Estate (友愛邨)	Siu Hei Court (兆禧苑) Siu Lun Court (兆麟苑) Siu On Court (兆安苑) Siu Shan Court (兆山苑)	Chi Lok Fa Yuen (置樂花園) Melody Garden (美樂花園) Tsui Ning Garden (翠寧花園) Yuet Wu Villa (悅湖山莊)
Total	24	23	13

Statistics on training visas granted

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Following are a question by the Hon Chan Wing-chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Regarding the information provided by the Government to the LegCo Panel on Manpower relating to overseas workers taking up employment in the territory for training purposes, will the Government inform this Council of -

- (a) the nature and number of posts under the trading and investment, manufacturing, banking and hotel sectors respectively as shown in the "training visas breakdown by nature of business"; and;
- (b) the number of applications for extension of stay, the time required for approving such applications as well as the longest period of extension granted, in respect of each category of duration of stay as shown in the "training visas breakdown by duration of stay"?

Reply:

- (a) Statistics supplementary to those supplied to the LegCo Panel on Manpower for the year 1996 on training visas granted to the businesses of Trading and Investment, Manufacturing, Banking and Hotel, with breakdown by nature of post, are as follows -

<u>Nature of Business</u>	<u>Nature of Post</u>	<u>Jan - Dec 1996</u>
Trading and Investment	Accountant	47
	Computer Operator	13
	Engineering	159
	Hotel Management	0
	Hotel Service	5
	Managerial	427
	Marketing Executive	255
	Medical Personnel	2
	Project Researcher	33
	Surveyor	4
	Others	99
Total	1,044	

Manufacturing	Accountant	7
	Computer Operator	1
	Engineering	80
	Managerial	81
	Marketing Executive	24
	Project Researcher	14
	Others	13
	Total	220
Banking	Accountant	18
	Computer Operator	11
	Managerial	276
	Marketing Executive	65
	Project Researcher	5
	Surveyor	7
	Others	18
	Total	400
Hotel	Accountant	1
	Engineering	0
	Hotel Management	30
	Hotel Service	52
	Managerial	9
	Marketing Executive	0
	Others	3
Total	95	

- (b) Under the existing policy for entry for training, the duration of training should not exceed 12 months. The majority of training applications last from 1 to 6 months. Applications for extension of stay for the purpose of training after the period originally approved are considered on a case by case basis. Each application is considered on its own merits, and the time required for processing each application varies according to the individual circumstances. Statistics on the number of applications for extensions for training purposes are not kept separately from other types of extensions. Our experience is that the number of such applications is small.

End

Confirmors in property transactions

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Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the respective numbers of transactions in uncompleted and completed flats involving confirmors in each of the months since January 1994, their respective proportions to the total number of property transactions in each of the months in question, and the number of confirmors involved in each transaction; and
- (b) whether it has conducted any study to ascertain if the recent phenomenon of a large number of property transactions involving confirmors is a reflection of a rising trend of speculation in the property market?

Answer:

Mr President,

Information on transactions involving confirmors, where available, is given in the Annex.

Confirmor is a term commonly used to refer to people who buy a property and then resell it before the actual assignment process for the property is completed. Transactions involving confirmors have usually existed, whether in an up-market or down-market. As there are great risks involved, home buyers should avoid buying from confirmors.

We have examined the recent increase in confirmor transactions. The rise in number gives a broad indication of speculative activity in the residential property market, and may contribute to price increases to some extent. However, upward movement in prices cannot be sustained without regard to affordability, or without a genuine increase in demand from end-users. This can be seen from the increasing number of cases recently where confirmors have reduced prices in order to resell their properties.

The ultimate solution to tackle speculation and soften price escalation lies in increasing land and housing supply, for which the Government has already announced the plans.

Number of confirmor transactions (resale before assignment)
involving residential flats

	<u>No. of confirmor transactions</u>	<u>Total no. of transactions in Hong Kong</u>	<u>Percentage of confirmor transactions to total number of transactions in Hong Kong</u>
Apr-94	823	16,255	5.1%
May-94	557	7,503	7.4%
Jun-94	384	5,334	7.2%
Jul-94	257	4,645	5.5%
Aug-94	264	5,938	4.4%
Sep-94	262	6,836	3.8%
Oct-94	330	7,310	4.5%
Nov-94	377	7,818	4.8%
Dec-94	107	5,403	2.0%
Jan-95	148	4,007	3.7%
Feb-95	136	3,100	4.4%
Mar-95	291	10,508	2.8%
Apr-95	208	8,726	2.4%
May-95	268	9,375	2.9%
Jun-95	169	5,887	2.9%
Jul-95	195	8,775	2.2%
Aug-95	160	5,694	2.8%
Sep-95	123	6,177	2.0%
Oct-95	106	6,299	1.7%
Nov-95	154	8,504	1.8%
Dec-95	148	7,543	2.0%
Jan-96	145	9,021	1.6%
Feb-96	151	9,137	1.7%
Mar-96	212	9,743	2.2%
Apr-96	234	10,982	2.1%
May-96	352	15,504	2.3%
Jun-96	187	9,136	2.0%
Jul-96	278	12,955	2.1%
Aug-96	236	9,009	2.6%
Sep-96	272	11,056	2.5%
Oct-96	336	14,964	2.2%
Nov-96	479	16,884	2.8%
Dec-96	727	17,814	4.1%
Jan-97	995	18,101	5.5%
Feb-97	1,137	16,350	7.0%

End

Methods to improve stamp sales

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Following is a question by the Hon Li Ka-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Recently, speculation in the local philatelic market has reached fever pitch and many people queue up to purchase new stamps. In view of this, will the Government inform this Council whether:

- (a) there are any plans to increase the quantity and frequency of stamp issues;
- (b) the service hours of post offices will be extended to facilitate people to purchase new stamps;
- (c) the Government will consider adopting a more appropriate sales method or identifying more suitable sales outlets in selling new stamps, as well as improving the safety measures in this regard; and
- (d) there were cases in the past two years involving Post Office staff abusing their authority so as to reap profits from stamp sales; if so, of the number of such cases and the measures in place to prevent their occurrence?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Post Office has increased the printing quantities of special stamps since late 1996 to cater for the increased demand. It will continue to increase printing quantities to meet known and foreseeable demand from the general public and stamp collectors. The Post Office intends to maintain the present practice of issuing every year five to six special or commemorative sets of stamps and two to three definitive stamp sheetlets to commemorate special events. Although a number of additional sheetlets has been issued in 1996-97, these were in connection with the Hong Kong '97 Stamp Exhibition. There are no plans to increase the frequency of issue in future.

At present, 20 district post offices open early for business at 8 a.m. on the first day of issue of special stamps. For the next issue on Sunday 27 April 1997, the Post Office will open all post offices at 8 a.m. The Post Office is committed to serving all customers who reach post offices before their closing time.

In view of the overwhelming response to the past few issues of special stamps and the sale of the remaining stock of definitive stamp sheets featuring the Queen's head, the Post Office is undertaking a thorough review of the arrangements for selling special stamps. One of the objectives of this review is to reduce the need for people to queue. A number of options is being considered, including further extending the advance order service, issuing of special stamps on Sundays as far as possible, balloting in special circumstances and extending quota arrangements to the second and subsequent days of issue, until there is no queuing.

So far, there have not been any proven cases of postal staff abusing their authority so as to reap profits from stamp sales in the past two years. The Independent Commission Against Corruption is currently investigating a number of cases of this nature involving postal staff.

End

Monitoring of institutions running mock examinations

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Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Man-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph W P Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

At present, some educational institutions run mock examinations which attract a large number of students participating in such examinations. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the following:

- (a) whether the running of mock examinations is regarded as a teaching activity and falls within the activities stipulated in the definition of 'school' set out in the Education Ordinance, and whether such educational institutions are required to register with the Education Department;
- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, whether there are any of the educational institutions running mock examinations which have not yet applied to the Education Department for registration; if so, whether the running of mock examinations by these unregistered educational institutions is in breach of the relevant provisions in the Education Ordinance; and

- (c) if the answer to (a) is in the negative, whether the running of mock examinations by these educational institutions is monitored by any government departments, so as to ensure the safety of the students participating in such activities and to protect their rights as consumers?

Reply:

Mr President:

- (a) Mock examination is a kind of teaching activity.

According to the Education Ordinance, 'school' means any institution, organisation or establishment which provides for 20 or more persons during any one day or eight or more persons at any one time, any nursery, kindergarten, primary secondary or post secondary education or any other educational course by any means. Hence, any institutions running mock examinations for the above number of persons are required to register with the Education Department.

- (b) & (c)

If institutions running mock examinations fall within the definition of schools as stipulated in the Education Ordinance are found to be unregistered, the Education Department would ask them to register as schools, or would proceed with prosecution against the operators.

End

Road tunnels lighting systems meet standard

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Choy Kan-pui and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport, Mr Paul Leung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether the various tunnel companies have devised a set of installation standards for the lighting systems in road tunnels;

- (b) whether the existing lighting systems in various road tunnels have posed any safety problems to motorists; and
- (c) of the number of traffic accidents occurring in the road tunnels in the past three years which were caused by the design of the lighting systems concerned?

Reply:

Mr President,

- (a) Standards on the lighting systems in road tunnels are set out in the Public Lighting Design Manual of the Highways Department, and the Transport Planning and Design Manual of the Transport Department to provide guidance to those involved in the planning and design of transport infrastructure of Hong Kong. They specify the design standards, daytime and night time lighting requirements including lighting intensity, luminance of the walls, glare control and avoidance of flicker, emergency lighting, lighting for bi-directional traffic, power supply and other technical controls etc. The lighting systems in all road tunnels in Hong Kong have been designed and installed according to these standards.
- (b) The performance of the lighting systems in all tunnels is regularly monitored by the Transport Department and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department. There is no indication that the existing lighting systems in road tunnels have posed safety problems to motorists.
- (c) In the past three years, there were no tunnel traffic accidents which were caused by the design of the tunnel lighting systems.

End

Enactment of legislation explained

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Albert Chan Wai-yip and a written reply by the Attorney General, Mr Jeremy Mathews, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is stipulated in by-law 28 of the Hawker (Urban Council) By-Laws that the Urban Council may, for the purpose of the charging of fees for the use of fixed pitches by licensees, erect a meter at or on each of those pitches. I sent a letter to the Attorney General in February this year enquiring about the matter, and my enquiry was then referred to the Urban Services Department (USD) to follow up. The USD has recently sent me a reply saying that "The Urban Council has never set up such fixed pitches. The keeping of the relevant by-law is to enable the Urban Council to have the legal authority to set up such pitches should there be policy reasons to do so, so as to avoid wasting resources in going through the process of re-enacting the relevant legislative provisions." In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the number of legislative provisions that have been enacted before the actual need for such provisions arises, as in the case of the above by-law;
- (b) whether consideration will be given to deleting or amending those legislative provisions which have never been invoked over the past several decades; and
- (c) whether the enactment of legislation before the need for such legislation arises is in keeping with the spirit of law-making?

Reply:

Mr President,

The answers to these three questions are as follows.

The Administration proposes legislation only when it is necessary to remedy a problem or to prevent an anticipated problem from happening. Therefore, all legislative schemes are introduced in response to a perceived need. However, it is not uncommon for authorities to be given the power to make subsidiary legislation that will supplement the legislative scheme. The powers given to such authorities, either in the principal Ordinance or in subsidiary legislation, need to cater for various possible methods of implementation. It is therefore inevitable that some powers are not actually utilised.

The repeal of redundant legislation is an on-going exercise which all policy branches carry out from time to time.

As was explained in the answer to the first question, legislation is not enacted before the need for it has arisen. There is, however, a practical need for statutory powers to be drafted in such a way as to enable the authority responsible for making, or enforcing, subsidiary legislation to do so effectively. This is not contrary to legal policy.

End

Allocation of housing resources

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Sin Chung-kai and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Regarding the calculation of household income of a public housing applicant, will the Government inform this Council whether it is aware if the Housing Authority will consider revising the existing method of calculating the applicant's income, or relaxing the income limit, so that the applicant's immediate family members in China awaiting approval to settle in Hong Kong would be taken into account when assessing his application for public housing?

Answer:

Mr President,

Applications for public rental housing are subject to the eligibility criteria set by the Housing Authority. The main ones include residence requirement and maximum income limits. Only family members of an applicant actually residing in Hong Kong may be included in the application, although other family members on arrival in Hong Kong may be added.

The rationale behind this policy is that scarce housing resources should be allocated to meet the needs of eligible households with family members residing in Hong Kong. Given the high level of demand for public rental housing, the Housing Authority has no intention of reviewing this policy.

End

Planning for Tai A Chau Detention Centre under review

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Emily Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen Leung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Given the lack of recreational facilities in the territory, will the Government inform this Council whether there are plans to turn the former Tai A Chau Detention Centre for Vietnamese migrants into a holiday camp, if not, why not?

Reply:

Mr President,

The South West New Territories (SWNT) Interim Recommended Strategy which was endorsed in 1993, has identified the Soko Islands, including Tai A Chau, as an area for conservation, landscape and coastal protection and with potential for tourist/recreation development including the provision of overnight accommodation.

The SWNT Development Strategy is now under review in the context of the Territorial Development Strategy Review. The feasibility of a holiday camp in Tai A Chau will be further examined in this context.

End

Surgery data in public hospitals

* * * * *

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Huang Chen-ya and a written reply by the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Does the Government know of:

- (a) the five types of surgery most commonly performed on patients in public hospitals in the past year; and

- (b) the following data in respect of each of the five types of surgery performed in each public hospital in the past year -
- (i) the number of operations performed;
 - (ii) the average hospitalisation time required and its standard deviation; and
 - (iii) the complication rate?

Reply:

The five types of most commonly performed surgery in 1996 as recorded in the following eight public hospitals, namely, Caritas Medical Centre (CMC), Queen Mary Hospital (QMH), Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH), Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital (PYNEH), Kwong Wah Hospital (KWH), United Christian Hospital (UCH), Ruttonjee Hospital (RH) and Yan Chai Hospital (YCH) are -

- (a) aspiration and curettage of the uterus;
- (b) lower segment caesarian section;
- (c) insertion of prosthetic lens;
- (d) close fracture reduction with internal fixation; and
- (e) unilateral inguinal hernia repair.

Details on the number of operations performed, the average length of stay in hospital and its standard deviation in respect of each of the five types of surgery mentioned above and performed in these eight hospitals in 1996 are shown in the Annex.

The above information is retrieved from the Hospital Authority's (HA's) computerised Medical Records Abstract System (MRAS), which has been implemented in eleven HA's hospitals, with full year data available for the eight hospitals mentioned in paragraph 1.

Collating statistics on surgical procedures in the hospitals without MRAS is extremely difficult as it requires professional staff to retrieve and review manually the medical records of all patients discharged in the past year, and each major hospital has between 40,000 to 100,000 discharges each year.

Information on complication rates is not presently captured in the MRAS and is therefore not available. Collating such information manually is more difficult as it requires professional staff to identify whether another co-existing disease is co-incident or is a result of the disease itself or of treatment given.

Annex

Hospital	Aspiration and curettage of the uterus		
	Number of operations performed	Average length of stay (days)	Standard deviation*
CMC	174	1.30	1.79
QMH	1335	2.17	1.55
QEH	157	2.36	1.50
PYNEH	639	2.30	1.86
KWH	674	1.65	1.80
UCH	502	2.49	1.68
RH	-	-	-
YCH	-	-	-

Hospital	Lower segment caesarian section		
	Number of operations performed	Average length of stay (days)	Standard deviation*
CMC	347	9.98	7.54
QMH	167	10.79	12.18
QEH	864	9.45	7.08
PYNEH	631	9.28	5.48
KWH	709	9.12	7.03
UCH	612	9.08	4.26
RH	-	-	-
YCH	-	-	-

Hospital	Insertion of prosthetic lens		
	Number of operations performed	Average length of stay (days)	Standard deviation*
CMC	366	5.77	4.19
QMH	450	2.85	2.47
QEH	57	6.21	7.82
PYNEH	183	2.41	1.83
KWH	186	4.29	3.05
UCH	474	1.77	1.59
RH	-	-	-
YCH	767	1.19	5.13

Hospital	Close fracture reduction with internal fixation		
	Number of operations performed	Average length of stay (days)	Standard deviation*
CMC	245	24.87	21.18
QMH	336	15.35	13.83
QEH	501	10.75	9.58
PYNEH	306	16.43	22.30
KWH	222	14.48	12.06
UCH	396	14.07	9.54
RH	7	33.43	12.35
YCH	133	28.89	27.50

Hospital	Unilateral inguinal hernia repair		
	Number of operations performed	Average length of stay (days)	Standard deviation*
CMC	211	4.44	6.83
QMH	93	7.55	9.87
QEH	646	3.85	6.19
PYNEH	255	3.47	2.99
KWH	339	6.04	7.42
UCH	317	3.25	3.82
RH	57	4.63	2.67
YCH	14	6.71	3.38

Note: * Standard deviation measures the amount of spread and variation of the data.

End

Service for new immigrants

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Allen Lee Peng-fei and a written reply by the acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mrs Stella Hung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

The findings of a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Psychological Association indicate that the people in the territory generally adopt a discriminatory attitude towards new immigrants from mainland China. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council -

- (a) of the activities carried out by the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education and the Equal Opportunities Commission in eliminating the discriminatory attitude of the territory's people towards new immigrants;
- (b) how does the Government assess the effectiveness of the activities mentioned in the answer to (a) above; and;
- (c) given that the findings of the above survey also indicate that many people in the territory are of the view that their share of the social welfare benefits has diminished as a result of the arrival of new immigrants, of the respective percentages of the resources allocated by the Social Welfare Department and the Labour Department for providing services to new immigrants out of the total expenditures of these two departments?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Government is committed to providing advice and support to new immigrants from China to enable them to settle successfully in Hong Kong and contribute to our long-term economic and social success. By facilitating their integration into the community, such efforts go a long way in addressing any discriminatory attitude which may exist towards the new arrivals.

My reply to the question is as follows:

- (a) The Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) promotes equal opportunities for all in its human rights education programmes. The programmes aim at bringing home the notion that all human beings are equal irrespective of differences in gender, physical ability, race, family and social status etc. Apart from such a general message, a specific one aimed at the elimination of discrimination against new immigrants is contained in a story book and story cassette distributed to children and one of the activity plans in the teaching kit distributed to schools. To date, 10,000 copies of the story book and 20,000 copies of the cassette tape have been distributed to children and 2,000 sets of the teaching kit have been distributed to schools. In addition, the CPCE has sponsored, under the Community Participation Scheme in 1996-97, two projects on elimination of discrimination against new immigrants and will sponsor another project on this theme in 1997-98.

The service of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is available to all - including new arrivals - who suffer discrimination on grounds of gender, marital status, pregnancy or disability. Its publicity and public education activities aim at eliminating discrimination on these grounds and promoting equal opportunities for all. Activities specifically to address discrimination on the ground of an individual being a new immigrant are outside the EOC's statutory functions.

- (b) The effectiveness of the CPCE's and EOC's activities to address discrimination can be assessed in terms of the changes in the public's attitude towards equal opportunities for all including new immigrants. Both the CPCE and EOC will conduct public opinion surveys, the results of which will indicate whether any improvement in such attitude has taken place.

- (c) Like all other members of our society, new arrivals are entitled to the same full range of general services provided by the Social Welfare Department and Labour Department. Both departments do not keep separate statistics on the proportion of their resources which have been allocated for the provision of general services to new arrivals. Nevertheless, we are aware that some of them may encounter adaptation difficulties and need special assistance. Government is therefore working closely with other voluntary agencies to provide a host of dedicated services to new arrivals to facilitate their smooth integration into our society as quickly as possible. The Social Welfare Department has been subventing the Hong Kong Branch of the International Social Services (ISS-HK) to provide a wide range of post-migration services. Programmes to help new arrivals begin at the moment they arrive. These include the provision of general enquiry services and assistance at the Hung Hom Railway Station, special orientation programmes, counselling and referral services. In 1997-98, Social Welfare Department will allocate a total of \$3.53 million to ISS-HK, representing about 0.02% of the total welfare expenditure, \$19 500 million, for 1997-98.

As regards the Labour Department, it has in 1997/98 sought new provision of \$1.66 million (\$2.13 million for full year annual recurrent) for setting up a one-stop Employment Service Centre for New Arrivals. The Centre will provide a comprehensive range of employment service for new arrivals including the provision of labour market information, counselling on practices and conditions of work in Hong Kong, careers guidance, intensive job matching and job referrals. The new provision, if approved, represents 0.28% of the department's total estimated expenditure for 1997/98.

End

Prudent lending criteria ensured

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services, Mr Rafael Hui, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Recently some property developers, when putting up new flats for sale, provide to home buyers a penalty-free mortgage arrangement whereby home buyers will not be required to pay any punitive charges even if they repay the mortgage loan in full within the first year of drawing the loan. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether a study has been conducted to examine if such a mortgage arrangement will further fuel property speculation; if so, whether the Government will issue guidelines to property developers and banks requiring them to levy punitive charges on home buyers for early repayment of mortgage loans?

Reply:

We are aware of recent reports of banks offering to waive the charges for early repayment of mortgage loans in connection with the sale of a certain new property development. Although no specific study has been conducted, our view is that this could affect the quality of banks' mortgage assets, regardless of whether there is also a stimulating effect on property speculation.

The punitive charges for early repayment are part of the terms and conditions of a mortgage loan between individual banks and flat buyers. It is therefore not relevant to issue guidelines on this matter to property developers. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) is not aware of any authorized institution actually having reduced or waived charges for early repayment. However, it has taken prompt action to formally advise all authorized institutions of its views on the matter. The HKMA will continue to monitor institutions' mortgage lendings closely to ensure that prudent lending criteria are followed.

End

Grants provided by cemeteries board

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Following is a question by the Hon Emily Lau Wai-hing and a written reply by the acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mrs Stella Hung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is learnt that the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Home Affairs has recently granted a sum of \$400,000 to three groups in the gay and lesbian community. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the criteria adopted for selecting the three groups to receive the grants;
- (b) of the purpose for making a grant to the three groups; and
- (c) whether consideration will be given to providing public funds to the three groups so that they can step up their publicity efforts in eradicating discrimination against the gay and lesbian community?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries annually invite applications from welfare, youth, charitable and non-profit making organisations for grants to carry out projects for the benefit of the people of Hong Kong. In December 1996, the Board approved applications for three gay and lesbian organisations and granted to them a total of \$375,000.

The replies to the question are as follows:-

- (a) in approving the applications from the three organisations, the Board took into account the objectives of the projects, the target group and number of beneficiaries, the community needs and the track records of the organisations;

- (b) the grants were provided to enable the organisations to provide counselling and support services to the homosexuals and also to organise public education activities with a view to promoting better understanding on sexual orientation and equal opportunities; and
- (c) no public funds have been set aside for the three organisations. However, they and other gay and lesbian groups can apply for public funds, under the Community Participation Scheme operated by the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education, in order to undertake projects on equal opportunities and elimination of discrimination. Also, the Home Affairs Branch will continue to advise and assist them on applying for funds from various sources. The Branch will also continue with its publicity efforts to promote equal opportunities for homosexuals.

End

Actions taken to ensure computer complaint to Year 2000

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Following is a question by the Hon Huang Chen-ya and a written reply by the Secretary for the Treasury, Mr K C Kwong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

At the time when the Year 2000 arrives, computer processors and software which have not been properly adjusted to handle the new year digits may produce data errors. In view of this, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the extent of the effects on the following computer systems, together with the up-to-date progress made in adjusting these systems and the expected completion dates of such adjustment -
 - (i) the computer systems for traffic light control;
 - (ii) the computer systems and software used by the Government;
 - (iii) the computer systems for the management of equipment used in the Hospital Authority; and

- (b) how does the Government ensure that -
- (i) the computer systems for the management of power stations;
 - (ii) the computer systems for the management of telephone networks; and
 - (iii) the computer systems and software used by various banks in operating their databases will not, in handling the new year digits, produce data errors which will affect the economy of the territory and the operation of its financial system?

Reply:

- (a) (i) The Year 2000 problem on computer processors and software will not affect traffic light signals and area traffic computer systems, which will continue to operate in the normal manner beyond 2000.
- (ii) With regard to government databases and computer software, the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) conducted a preliminary assessment of some 250 computer application systems it maintained in May 1996. About 20% of these systems may be affected by the Year 2000 problem. ITSD has started work to define the extent of non-compliance and to carry out necessary modification to these systems progressively. It will complete that all necessary modification work before the year 2000.

Apart from ITSD, six other government departments develop and maintain their own computer applications and have their own IT staff. The Year 2000 problem would affect about half of these 310 applications. These six departments, with the advice of ITSD, are also taking active steps to address the problem and complete the necessary modification of their systems before the year 2000.

- (iii) The Asset Management System of the Hospital Authority, a computer system used for the management of assets including equipment, is already Year 2000 compliant. Therefore, there is no need for any programming adjustment to the system to deal with the Year 2000 problem.

- (b) (i) The power companies are aware of the possible impact of the Year 2000 problem on their computer systems and are implementing measures to address the problem. The companies have advised that they will implement corrective measures by early 1999. The Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services will monitor the progress of the companies in implementing the measures, with a view to ensuring normal supply of electricity beyond 2000.
- (ii) The Year 2000 problem will not affect the operation of computer systems controlling telephone networks, which is not linked to the "year" field. As regards the impact of the change of the "year" field on the billing and other administrative systems, the Government will remind public telecommunication service operators to take necessary steps to prevent consumers from being affected by billing or other types of errors due to the field change.
- (iii) The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) drew the Year 2000 problem to the attention of both the Hong Kong Association of Banks and the Deposit-taking Companies Association in 1996. In January 1997, the HKMA wrote to all authorised financial institutions enquiring about the progress on the action they had taken to deal with the problem. Of the responses received, some institutions have confirmed that they are already Year 2000 compliant while the majority of the institutions are progressing towards Year 2000 compliance.

The HKMA will continue working closely with the two Associations to promote awareness among authorised financial institutions of the need to tackle the Year 2000 problem. The HKMA is planning to step up its monitoring efforts with a view to ensuring all authorised institutions will be Year 2000 compliant by December 1998. Where necessary, it may require institutions to submit details of the measures which they have taken, or will be taking, in dealing with the problem. HKMA will monitor the implementation of such measures through their on-site examinations.

End

Ferry service at Wan Chai Waterfront

Following is a question by the Hon Howard Young and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport, Mr Paul Leung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In view of the impending opening of the extension to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) and the concentration of hotels in certain areas near the Kowloon waterfront, will the Government inform this Council whether it will consider offering franchises to the territory's existing ferry companies to operate both regular and event-related ferry services between HKCEC and Tsim Sha Tsui and between HKCEC and Tsim Sha Tsui East; if not, why not?

Reply:

Mr President,

The opening of the extension to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) will generate some additional traffic. However, it is not envisaged that the increased demand will be sufficient to support a new ferry service in addition to ferry routes presently being provided by our two ferry franchisees. The Government therefore has no plans to introduce a regular ferry service from the HKCEC to Tsim Sha Tsui or Tsim Sha Tsui East.

On existing services, the Star Ferry Company Limited operates a ferry service between Tsim Sha Tsui and the Wan Chai Ferry Pier from 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. daily. There is ample spare capacity on this service. It takes only about 3 minutes to walk from the Wan Chai ferry pier to the HKCEC. The Hongkong & Yaumati Ferry Company Limited also operates ferry routes from Wan Chai to Hung Hom and to Tuen Mun. In addition, there is an MTR service between Tsim Sha Tsui and Wan Chai. The Wan Chai MTR Station is connected to the HKCEC by a covered walkway.

We appreciate that there may be a need for special arrangements to cater for large-scale functions at the HKCEC, especially those which last beyond the normal operating hours of regular ferry services. We will consider arranging special event-related ferry services if necessary.

End

Slope upgrading works near schools are underway

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Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Man-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Works, Mr Kwong Hon-sang, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

At the LegCo sitting on 5 June last year, I raised an oral question on potentially hazardous slopes and substandard slopes situated within or in the vicinity of school boundaries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the schools which still have hazardous slopes within or in the vicinity of their boundaries, and how does the number of these schools compare with that provided by the Administration in its reply to the above question last year;
- (b) of the slope maintenance works in connection with the schools mentioned in the reply to (a) above which would be completed before the onset of the rainy season this year; and in regard to those slope maintenance works in connection with these schools which are not expected to be completed before this year's rainy season, of the reasons for such works not being completed on schedule and the specific timetable for their completion; and
- (c) whether, under the Government's current policy on carrying out maintenance works on hazardous slopes, high priority will be given to maintaining hazardous slopes in the vicinity of schools; if not, why not; and of the categories of maintenance works on hazardous slopes which have to be carried out as a matter of priority?

Reply:

Mr President,

- (a) We have completed a selection exercise in January this year for all slopes affecting the 435 schools on the list provided by the Education Department last year. Detailed studies on the selected slopes are now underway and substandard cases have been identified from some of the completed studies. As the detailed studies progress, more substandard cases may be discovered.

In June 1996, five schools were known to be affected by substandard government slopes. Slope upgrading works at four of these schools have been completed. Another eight schools are now known to be affected by substandard government slopes making a total of nine cases.

Regarding private slopes, fourteen schools were known in June 1996 to be affected by substandard private slopes and served with Dangerous Hillside (DH) Orders. Works at two of them have been completed. Another six schools are now known to be affected by substandard private slopes and have also been served with DH Orders, making a total of eighteen cases.

- (b) The completion dates for the contracts for substandard public slopes are shown in the attached Table 1. Works has commenced on six of the nine cases, mostly since end 1996, and two of them are expected to be completed in this month. Works on the remaining three will commence in the coming months.

The detailed works programmes and the expected completion dates for the substandard private slopes identified are at Table 2. In all cases, DH Orders have been served and are at various stages of compliance by private owners. In the interim, private owners and their consultants are required to step up slope maintenance and perform any necessary temporary protection works to reduce potential hazard.

Slope upgrading works involve stabilisation and improvement works which are more complicated than normal maintenance works. The study, ground investigation, design and construction of these upgrading works take time and it is not possible to complete them all before this rainy season. As an illustration, typical upgrading works for a slope would require 9 to 18 months works on site after completing the necessary study, investigation and design. For private slopes, more time is required for sorting out the land status, the subsequent appointment of Authorised Persons and tendering for the upgrading works.

- (c) Government has significantly increased its rate of output of upgrading works in recent years. High priority has been given to tackling slopes affecting schools as announced in our 1996 Policy Commitments. We are now proceeding in full force to implement this commitment.

Government will monitor the progress of upgrading works to private slopes as far as compliance with the Dangerous Hillside Orders is concerned. In view of the high priority policy, an Inter-Department Meeting comprising representatives from Education Department, Civil Engineering Department, Buildings Department, Housing Department and Architectural Services Department is in place to monitor and advise on the progress of work involved.

Table 1
Schools affected by Government Slopes which are Being Upgraded or Pending Upgrading
Under the Current LPM Programme

No.	Name of School	Commencement Date of Works	Scheduled Completion Date
1.	FMO Sam Mun Tsai New Village Primary School	Oct 96	Apr 97
2.	Choi Wan St. Joseph's Primary School	Aug 97	Jan 98
3.	Bradbury Junior School	Oct 96	Jan 98
4.	Lingnan College	Oct 96	Aug 97
5.	*Cognitio College	Dec 96	Dec 97
6.	Queen Elizabeth School	Dec 96	Apr 97
7.	Ko Lau Wan Fishermen's School	Jun 97	May 98
8.	Li Sing Primary School	Jul 97	Nov 97
9.	Sir Ellis Kadoorie School	Apr 97	Oct 97

* School also reported in June 1996 list.

Table 2
Schools affected by private slopes in respect of which Dangerous Hillside Orders have
been issued under Section 27A of the Buildings Ordinance

No.	Name of School	Progress of Works or Studies	Expected Date of Works Completion
1.	*St. Louis School	Temporary protection works completed. Detailed design submitted.	early 98
2.	*The True Light Middle School of Hong Kong	Works proposal being finalised.	mid 97
3.	*Wah Yan College, Kowloon	Temporary protection works completed. Preliminary report submitted.	mid 98
4.	*Diocesan Boys' School	Temporary protection completed. Detailed design under preparation.	end 98
5.	*SKH Stanley Village Primary School	Investigation in progress.	end 98
6.	*Po Leung Kuk Perching Tsang Primary School	Detailed design under preparation, lease condition under modification, may affect design option.	mid 98
7.	*St. Basil's School	Works in progress.	mid 98
8.	*Kiangsu & Chekiang Primary School	(1) Works for 1st slope in progress (2) Investigation for 2nd slope in progress	(1) mid 97 (2) mid 98 Note 1
9.	*St. Paul's Co-education College	Authorised Person (AP) appointed. Ground investigation work in progress. Predicted completion date of investigation report in Mid-97.	Note 2
10.	*TWGH's Lee Ching Dea Memorial School	AP appointed. Tendering procedures for proposed ground investigation	Note 2

No.	Name of School	Progress of Works or Studies	Expected Date of Works Completion
		work completed.	
11.	*The Building Contractors' Association School	AP appointed. Tendering procedures for proposed ground investigation work completed.	Note 2
12.	*The True Light Middle School of Kowloon	AP appointed. Tendering for ground investigation works in progress.	Note 2
13.	Raimondi College	AP appointed. Ground investigation proposal approved.	Note 2
14.	SKH St. James' Primary School	AP appointment in progress.	Note 2
15.	Cognitio College	DH Order issued on 28.1.97. Works already started.	end 97
16.	Marymount Secondary School	AP appointment in progress.	Note 2
17.	Caritas St. Paul Prevocational School Cheung Chau	Order served on 13.3.97. AP appointment in progress	Note 2
18.	Buddhist Chi Hong Kindergarten	Consent to commencement of works was issued.	Note 3

Note 1: Apart from the 1st slope reported in June 1996, a separate DH Order has been issued in respect of a 2nd slope facing Kin Wah Street.

Note 2: Date of completion depends on ground investigation which has not yet started or has not been completed.

Note 3: Repair works will take approximately 4 months, however, commencement of works is subject to resolution of land status complications, since part of the proposed works extended outside lot of school.

* School also reported in June 1996 list.

End

Stamp sales

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Li Kai-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Stephen Ip, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

The sale of the remaining stock of definitive stamp sheets featuring the Queen's head by the Post Office on 18 March this year attracted many people to queue up overnight outside four post offices. The long queues had not only caused inconvenience to pedestrians, but also left behind a large amount of garbage. An elderly man in his seventies collapsed and died whilst queuing up to purchase stamps. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

- (a) a review of the above incident has been conducted by the Post Office; if so, what the results are; if not, why not; and
- (b) the Post Office will consider adopting the registration and ballot arrangement in future sales of first-day cover and commemorative stamp issues, so as to save people the trouble of queuing up for long hours?

Reply:

Mr President,

Having regard to the increasing demand for special stamps in recent months, the Post Office has implemented a series of measures, including increasing the printing quantities of stamps, opening some 20 district post offices at 8 a.m. on the day of issue of special stamps, introducing the Local Standing Order Service for advance ordering of the year's stamp issues, and extending the advance order service for first day covers to include stamp sheetlets and sets of stamps.

In view of the overwhelming response to the past few issues of special stamps and the sale of the remaining stock of definitive stamp sheets featuring the Queen's head, the Post Office is undertaking a thorough review of the arrangements for selling special stamps. One of the objectives of this review is to reduce the need for people to queue. A number of options is being considered, including further extending the advance order service, issuing of special stamps on Sundays as far as possible, balloting in special circumstances and extending quota arrangements to the second and subsequent days of issue, until there is no queuing.

End

Disposal of abandoned vehicles in the streets

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Following is a question by the Hon Zachary Wong and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport, Mr Paul Leung, at the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the number of vehicles abandoned in the streets and open spaces which were disposed of by the relevant authorities in the past three years, and of the methods used in disposing of these abandoned vehicles;
- (b) whether the authorities would recover the expenses involved from the owners concerned after disposing of these abandoned vehicles; if so, whether any difficulties were encountered in recovering such expenses; and whether, in the past three years, there were any owners of these abandoned vehicles who were not approached for the recovery of the expenses involved and, if so, of the number of such owners and the reasons for not recovering the expenses from them;
- (c) of the total expenses incurred by the Government in the disposal of these abandoned vehicles, and the amount of expenses recovered from the owners concerned in the past three years; and
- (d) of the measures adopted to deter vehicle owners from abandoning their vehicles in the streets and open spaces?

Reply:

Mr President,

- (a) Where a vehicle is found abandoned on a road, as defined in Section 107 of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), or a vehicle is left on the road in such a way that it contravenes the Ordinance, the vehicle is liable to be removed. A notice will be issued to the owner to give a specified period for claiming the vehicle. If the vehicle is claimed, the owner is required to pay removal fee and storage charge. If the vehicle is not claimed when the specified period expires, it will be considered as property of Government and may then be disposed of either by auction or scrapping.

Vehicles abandoned on Government land are dealt with under Section 6 of the Crown Land Ordinance (Cap. 28). A notice will be issued requiring the owner to remove the vehicle within a specified period. If this is not complied with, the vehicle will be considered as property of Government and may similarly be disposed of by auction or scrapping.

The number of vehicles abandoned in streets and open spaces which became the property of Government and disposed of by auction or scrapping in the last three years are as follows:

	Disposed by Auction	Disposed by Scrapping	TOTAL
1994	38	1349	1387
1995	59	1404	1463
1996	25	632	657

(b) Unclaimed and abandoned vehicles which become the property of the Government are disposed of by auction or scrapping depending on the potential value of the vehicle. The administration does not normally seek recovery of removal or administrative costs as costs from owners incurred may be recovered from the revenue from auction or scrapping.

(c) The administrative and removal costs and the revenue from disposing of abandoned vehicles in the last three years are as follows:

	Administrative & Removal Cost (HK\$)	Revenue from Disposal (HK\$)		
		Auction	Scrapping	TOTAL
1994	111,320	215,900	539,600	755,500
1995	501,600	679,670	564,400	1,244,070
1996	247,720	279,490	268,600	548,090

(d) Transport Department operates two Abandoned Vehicle Surrender Centres which offer free disposal service for unwanted vehicles. To encourage owners to dispose of their unwanted vehicles properly, the owners can get a pro rata refund of the annual licence fee if the licence of the concerned vehicle is still valid for 60 days or more. Over the past three years, a total of 1,177 such unwanted vehicles were surrendered.

End