

**HONG KONG
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INFORMATION
SERVICES**

**DAILY
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BULLETIN**

Wednesday, May 24, 1972

"JUMBO" FLOATING RESTAURANT FIRE**Findings Of Commission Of Inquiry**

The fire on the "Jumbo" floating restaurant at Aberdeen last October was started as the result of electric welding in the aquarium section of the vessel.

This is the finding of the Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Governor to investigate the fire and to make such recommendations arising therefrom as it may deem appropriate.

The Commission says the "immediate spread of the fire was due to the easily ignitable and inflammable nature of the material used and the presence of large areas of wet paint."

The Commission's 32-page report was tabled in the Legislative Council this (Wednesday) afternoon by the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker.

The fire broke out on the vessel on October 30 last year. The floating restaurant was then under construction in Aberdeen harbour. Thirty-four people, including four children, lost their lives and 42 others were injured in the fire.

The Commission heard evidence from 90 witnesses, looked at 61 documentary or other exhibits and considered the submissions of Counsel for the interested parties.

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On its finding on the cause of the fire, the Commission has this to say: "We have no doubt that the fire was started by arcing and molten metal globules falling from an electric welding electrode holder in the false ceiling at the after end of the aquarium By reason of the nature of the material and the semi-darkness in which that area must have been shrouded, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the fire smouldered unobserved for several hours before it finally burst into flames."

The Commission says the responsibility for the outbreak of the fire must lie with those actually welding, the person by whom they were employed and the Chung Wah Shipbuilding and Engineering Company.

Extra Precautions

In the view of the Commission the Chung Wah Company and the owners, the Aberdeen Restaurant Enterprises Ltd., should "both have taken extra precautions against fire in view of the large amount of unprotected but highly inflammable decorative material throughout the Jumbo. The owners should have provided temporary but adequate warning, fire fighting and rescue facilities as well as radio or telephonic communication with the shore."

Other principal conclusions and recommendations of the Commission are:

- * the fire was remarkable for its intensity and the rapidity with which it engulfed the whole of the Jumbo;
- * many survivors owe their lives to the actions of members of the Royal Hong Kong Police and the Fire Services Department and of private individuals;
- * the Ambulance Service responded efficiently to the emergency;

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- * the fireboats tackled the blaze as quickly and capably as they were able, but it may be that the stationing of one small fireboat in Aberdeen Harbour is not sufficient in present conditions;
- * the Jumbo was consumed entirely except for the basic hull and superstructure;
- * if completed and used as intended the Jumbo would have presented a risk to life in the case of fire.

On the rapid spread of the fire to the remainder of the vessel, the Commission says this was caused by the open plan design coupled with the chimney effect of the central staircase complex, the highly inflammable decorative material lining the inside and outside of the Jumbo, the indiscriminate distribution of dangerous goods and other combustible material, and the uninsulated steel construction of the hull and superstructure.

Fire Alarm System

Commenting on the loss of life, the Commission says this may be attributed to the lack of an adequate fire alarm system, the rapid spread of the fire, and the lack of safe escape routes.

On the question of criminal liability, the Commission makes this observation: "We have deliberately refrained from any attempt to apportion the responsibility between the parties we have just mentioned or to determine their civil liabilities to each other, to their respective workmen or to third parties. These are matters which should, if necessary, be properly left to the regular courts of law. We have considered, only to reject - apart from matters within the Dangerous Goods Ordinance - the question of criminal liability. The acts and the commissions were negligent. They caused death. But in no instance do we think they reached that high degree of negligence or recklessness that is necessary to bring them within the realm of manslaughter."

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On the question of supervisory powers over work carried out on vessels or other floating objects in Colony waters, the finding of the Commission is that there is considerable doubt as to how far the jurisdiction and powers of the Fire Services, Marine and Labour Departments extend to matters of industrial safety in undertakings located on water.

The net result, the Commission notes, was that no Government department took action with regard to the conditions existing on the Jumbo.

The Commission believes "it is desirable that some Government Departments should clearly be made responsible to take an overall interest in work proceeding on vessels outside a registered shipyard" and that "such interest should extend generally to the safety of working conditions and practices and the precautions to be taken against fire and means of escape."

Responsibility

The Commission recommends that the Director of Marine should be given overall responsibility for the safety of working conditions on ships and floating structures building or under repair or renovation in the waters of the Colony.

The Commission is satisfied that such matters would be most conveniently dealt with by the Marine Department, and recommends that legislation be passed to give the Director of Marine the appropriate powers of enforcement.

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With regards to the Marine Department, the Commission further recommends:

- *the department remains the sole authority for the inspection and licensing of floating restaurants and similar undertakings under the Merchant Shipping Ordinance;
- *but it should take into consideration the requirements imposed by the Fire Services Department upon restaurants on land;
- *that further consideration should be given to floating restaurants currently conducting business in the Colony;
- *that more reliable ways to test new materials should be sought; and
- *that the Merchant Shipping Ordinance should be amended to remove doubt.

The Commission also recommends that consideration be given to publicising the provisions of the Dangerous Goods Ordinance and the possible dangers of some new and untried materials.

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Note to Editors: The three-member Commission of Inquiry was appointed by the Governor on November 9, 1971 under the Commissions of Inquiry Ordinance (Cap. 86). The Chairman was Mr. Derek Cons, District Judge, and the other two members were Mr. Raymond Y.K. Kan, an architect, and Mr. S.C. Johnson, Principal Surveyor with Lloyds Register of Shipping in Hong Kong. The Secretary to the Commission was Mr. M.S. Roberts, a Senior Executive Officer.

Copies of the Commission's report, printed in English and Chinese, are distributed separately in the Press Boxes.

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INDUSTRIALISTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRADE WASTE DISPOSAL

Director Of Urban Services Tells Council

The Director of Urban Services, the Hon. D.R.W. Alexander, said today the responsibility for disposing of trade waste had to remain with the individual industrialist.

He was replying in the Legislative Council to Dr. the Hon. S.Y. Chung who had asked: "In order to help the 'Keep Hong Kong Clean Campaign' will Government consider providing services to dispose of industrial waste and refuse from factories situated in urban areas?"

Mr. Alexander pointed out that one of the aims of the forthcoming campaign was to ensure that industrialists provided themselves with proper ways and means of disposing of their waste.

"There is no doubt in my mind that if I were to take up my Honourable Friend's suggestion, I would merely be giving the Cleansing Division of my Department an additional burden which it could not shoulder and which, far from helping the 'Keep Hong Kong Clean' Campaign, would make it even more difficult," he added.

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CLOSING LAI CHI KOK BAY TO PUBLIC SWIMMING

Will Deprive Public Of Its Use For Other Recreations

The proposal to close the Lai Chi Kok Bay beach to public swimming was considered and rejected since it would deprive the public of the use of the beach for other recreational purposes such as boating and picnicking.

This was stated today by the Director of Urban Services, the Hon. D.R.W. Alexander, in the Legislative Council in reply to the Hon. Szeto Wai.

Mr. Szeto had asked: "In view of the badly polluted sea-water at Lai Chi Kok Bay, would Government consider closing the beach there to public bathing?"

Mr. Alexander said the final solution to the problem lies in the eventual reclamation of the Bay, which has been zoned for reclamation and open space development in the Outline Development Plan for Lai Chi Kok.

He said swimming at Lai Chi Kok Bay had for long been a matter of grave concern to the Urban Council. With the recent opening of Lei Cheng Uk Swimming Pool, the Bay was degazetted as a public bathing beach with effect from February 4 this year.

"All life saving services were withdrawn; notices advising members of the public not to swim there were put up on the beach; and my department also again warned the public through both the Press and radio of the danger of swimming in the Bay," he said.

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ACCOUNTANT GENERAL TO CONDUCT SURVEY

On Setting Up Of More Sub-Treasuries In Kowloon

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, said today the Accountant General will conduct a survey over the next few months to find out if there is sufficient demand to justify the cost of setting up one or more additional sub-Treasuries in Kowloon.

The survey, he said, will be conducted with the help of the Secretariat for Home Affairs and the Commissioner of Census and Statistics.

He was speaking in the Legislative Council in reply to the Hon. H.J.C. Browne, who had asked whether Government would take corrective measures to reduce waiting times for members of the public who visit the Kowloon Sub-Treasury to pay their bills.

Mr. Haddon-Cave said that, however, even if additional offices were opened, it would not be possible to reduce the waiting time at due date periods to what could be regarded as reasonable.

The reason is that many people leave payments to the last few days before they are due, while others who pay by cheque still prefer to attend in person rather than use the post, he added.

However, he said, in the past few years, waiting times at the Kowloon Sub-Treasury have been reduced as a result of a campaign carried out by the Accountant General with the help of the Information Services Department to persuade people who have banking accounts to pay their bills by post.

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"It is true that there is still congestion at the Kowloon Sub-Treasury, as well as at the two cash offices on Hong Kong Island. Usually this occurs during the last few days of each quarterly rating period, that is, at the end of April, July, October and January."

The Financial Secretary said that the first three months in 1972 were unusually busy periods owing to the large backlog of water bills issued for payment in these months.

"This backlog was accumulated during the second half of 1971 following the introduction of the revised water charges and of the free units which slowed down substantially the rate at which water bills could be issued," he explained.

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KENNEDY TOWN JOCKEY CLUB CLINIC

Full-Time Maternal And Child Health Service Provided

The Director of Medical and Health Services, Dr. the Hon. Gerald Choa, said today one doctor was posted to the general out-patients clinic of the Kennedy Town Jockey Club Clinic.

He was replying to the Hon. Wilfred Wong who had asked: "Will Government state how many doctors are in attendance at the Kennedy Town Jockey Club Clinic and whether it is necessary to post additional doctors there?"

Dr. Choa said that the clinic also provided a full-time maternal and child health service and there were times when two doctors were in attendance.

"If in the summer months the attendance figure rises, another doctor will be posted there," he said.

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RESETTLEMENT ESTATES STAFF UNDER INSTRUCTIONS

To Encourage People To Report Crime To Police

The Commissioner for Resettlement, the Hon. I.M. Lightbody, said today when crime in an estate was reported to estates staff, they were under instructions to encourage the person to make a report to the Police.

He was replying in the Legislative Council to the Hon. Oswald Cheung.

Mr. Cheung had asked: "Have any departmental standing instructions been promulgated by the Commissioner for Resettlement on the action to be taken by his staff concerning: (a) Reports on crime made by residents of resettlement estates to his staff; (b) criminal activities of which his staff have actual knowledge?"

Mr. Lightbody added that more often than not the individual declines to report to the Police.

In such event, the estate staff would try to get the complainant's name and address, and the complaint, and inform the station, he said.

"Where estates staff personally witness a crime in an estate, they are under instructions to make a report to the Police."

"It is however very exceptional for this situation to arise," he said.

In reply to another question by the Hon. Oswald Cheung, the Commissioner said no record was kept in the Resettlement Department of the number of crimes reported by tenants to estates staff.

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"The maintenance of statistics on crime in estates, as elsewhere, is a matter for the Police, and they do in fact keep very detailed statistics on this subject," he added.

Mr. Cheung had asked: "How many reports of crime were made by residents of resettlement estates to staff of the Resettlement Department in 1971 and how many of these were forwarded to the police?"

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INTERRUPTION OF WATER SUPPLY

Water supply to an area in the Western District will be turned off for eight hours starting from 10 p.m. on Friday, May 26 to allow work to be carried out on connecting a fresh water main at the junction of Hill Road and Des Voeux Road West.

The affected area includes premises in Des Voeux Road West, Hill Road, Queen's Road West and Whitty Street.

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CONSTANT LIAISON AT DIVISIONAL LEVEL

Between Estates Staff And Police

The Commissioner for Resettlement, the Hon. I.M. Lightbody, said today there was constant liaison at Divisional level between his estates staff and Police.

"In addition we are supplied with regular Police reports on triad and gang activities in the estates," he added.

He was replying in the Legislative Council to the Hon. Oswald Cheung who had asked: "Will Government indicate the extent of consultation between the Commissioner for Resettlement and the Commissioner of Police on the maintenance of law and order in the resettlement estates?"

Mr. Lightbody said there was frequent consultation on practical ways and means of discouraging criminal activities, such as by cutting off access to roofs and meter rooms which were popular venue for gangs.

"The very layout of our estates does however tend to make life easy for the criminal; there are a vast number of entrances and exits to the blocks; there are too many secluded rear courtyards or public open spaces between the back of the blocks and the adjoining hillside," he added.

He pointed out that the various floors of the multi-storeyed blocks were essentially layered streets, where there were few pedestrians by day and not much of a Police presence.

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"To me it is a constant surprise that there was not more crime in the estates, considering the very sparse Police presence in them," he said.

Because of manpower problems, 50,000-person estate could have as little as three beats in it, and visitors to the estates frequently commented on the absence of Police, he added.

"I have recently made a comprehensive report to the Commissioner of Police on various ways in which the Force could help to improve the situation in these crowded estates," he said.

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RESOLUTION TO EXTEND OPERATION OF TWO SECTIONS

Of The Inland Revenue Ordinance

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, today moved a resolution in the Legislative Council to extend the operation of two sections which had been added to the Inland Revenue Ordinance in 1969.

Section 51A and Section 51B which are due to expire on June 19 this year are designed to assist in the investigation of tax evasion.

Section 51A gives the Commissioner of Inland Revenue the power to require a statement of assets and liabilities from a person, if he is of the opinion that the person has made, without reasonable excuse an incorrect return or supplied false information with a view to understating his assessable income or profits.

Section 51B empowers a magistrate to issue a search warrant on application by the Commissioner or an authorised officer, if he is satisfied that a person has not submitted a return when required by the Commissioner, or that a person has made an incorrect return or supplied false information with the intention of evading tax.

Moving the resolution, the Financial Secretary said when those two sections had been first proposed, it had been generally felt that an excessive and arbitrary use of those powers might be detrimental to the business community.

The two sections had been given, therefore, a statutory life of three years in the first instance, with a proviso that they could be extended by resolution of the Legislative Council at the end of that period.

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"I am advised by the Commissioner of Inland Revenue that these two sections have proved to be most useful and effective," he said.

He pointed out that over the first two and a half years of their operation, notices under section 51A had been served on 13 occasions and 12 had been complied with without objection.

Apart from those cases, tax payers in 88 other cases had co-operated in returning statements of assets and liability without the Commissioner having resort to formal notices, he added.

The powers contained in section 51B had so far been used on two occasions and the searches had been carried out with the minimum of disruption of business, he said.

"I consider that those two sections have been well tested and the Government proposes that they should become permanent provisions of the Inland Revenue Ordinance. To this end a bill will shortly be introduced into this Council.

"However, as the law stands at present, these sections are due to expire on June 19, 1972. Accordingly, this resolution seeks to extend the operation of these two sections until October 1 this year," he said.

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AUXILIARY DEFENCE FORCES PAY BEING EXAMINED

Equal Pay For Women Under Consideration

The question of the levels of pay and allowances in the Auxiliary Police and other Defence Forces generally had been the subject of examination in recent weeks.

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker said this today in the Legislative Council in reply to the Hon. P.C. Woo.

Mr. Woo had asked: "Will Government introduce equal pay for women in the auxiliary and essential services?"

Sir Hugh added it was hoped in the near future to put recommendation first to the Executive Council and then to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council.

The position of women members of those Forces in the pay structure was one of the matters which had been under consideration in that context and the general proposals would include recommendations on that aspect, he said.

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THREE-YEAR AIDED POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Position To Be Reviewed Next Year

The Director of Education, the Hon. J. Canning, said today he intended to review the position in 1973 about the provision of three-year aided post-primary education for children in the 12-14 years age group.

This review, he said, would enable Government to set a date for achieving its ultimate aim of providing such education for all children in this age-group.

Mr. Canning was speaking in the Legislative Council in reply to the Hon. T.K. Ann who had asked Government to give the target date by which every child in the 12-14 age group would be assured of three years of assisted education.

Mr. Ann had also asked Government to give its anticipated percentage increase by the end of the next five years in the number of children in the 12-16 age group (currently 18 per cent) who would be provided with five years of assisted secondary education leading to a Certificate of Education.

The Director said that as a first step towards achieving the ultimate aim of providing three years post-primary education for all children in the 12-14 years age group, it was intended to provide places for 50 per cent of this age group by 1976.

"On the basis of the 1971 Census, the number of places required by 1976 is about 157,000. About 79,100 places have already been provided in 1971-72 and it is hoped to provide a further 31,000 places in 1972-73.....," he said.

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This would leave a likely commitment of about 46,900 places by the end of 1972-73, he added.

Mr. Canning said that although satisfactory progress had been made towards achieving this interim aim, it was not possible to give, at this stage, a date by which the ultimate aim could be achieved.

On assisted secondary education leading to a Certificate of Education, he said the anticipated percentage increase in the number of Forms I-V places from September 1971 to 1976 was about 35 per cent.

He said the approved policy for the expansion of secondary education in the public sector provided for 18-20 per cent of the children in the 12-16 age group to have five years of assisted secondary education leading to a Certificate of Education.

"On the basis of the 1971 Census, the number of Forms I-V places required to reach the approved target by 1976 will be approximately 95,300.

"In September 1971, there were approximately 70,500 places for Forms I-V in Government and aided schools, representing 14.7 per cent of the 12-16 age group at that time," he said.

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MODIFICATIONS TO POLICY ON RENEWAL OF CROWN RENT

Announced Today In Legislative Council

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, announced today in the Legislative Council a number of modifications to the policy on renewal of Crown rent.

The modifications would be of benefit to the holders of renewable Crown leases, he added.

He said that in proposing the modifications he had had in mind three objectives:

- * To reduce the overall burden of renewal;
- * To cushion the impact of the increases which even after reduction will be necessary; and
- * To minimize or eliminate cases of hardship.

The Colonial Secretary explained that the first of those modifications was that the general level of all renewal rents assessed in accordance with the provisions of the Crown Lease would in effect be reduced by 20 per cent from the first half-yearly payment after today.

That reduction would also be applied in the case of leases yet to be renewed and would result in the reduction of the rate of interest used in the calculation from five per cent to four per cent, he said.

In addition to that reduction in the level of renewal rents it had been decided, so as to reduce even further the impact of that modified rent, to introduce the renewal rents by gradual stages over a period of five years from 1973, he added.

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That would be effected by charging only 50 per cent of the reduced rent due in 1973 and thereafter increasing by annual stages of 10 per cent until 1978 the full modified rent would become payable.

That concession would also affect those people who had renewed their leases in the five years prior to June 30, 1973, he said.

He explained that the reassessed rent payable after June 30, 1973 for leases renewed up to five years prior to that date would be reduced by the appropriate percentage on a similar basis according to the year of renewal.

Lease

If a lessee had renewed his lease in say 1970 he would after June 30, 1973 get the benefit of the last two stages of the concession, that was to say, the reduced rent payable would be further reduced by 20 per cent for his first year's payment after June 30, 1973, and by 10 per cent after June 30, 1974, but not thereafter further reduced, the Colonial Secretary cited.

He pointed out that particular consideration had been given to pre-war rent controlled properties.

In those cases the existing Crown rent would be payable just so long as the property remained subject to tenancies the rents of which were controlled under the Landlord and Tenant Ordinance.

When that ceased to be the case lessees would begin to pay the modified Crown rent as assessed at the date of renewal, he added.

He pointed out that a similar concession would be available to lessees with under-developed property who renewed their leases on the basis of existing use and development.

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In those cases, the lessee would have the option of having his full renewal rent assessed at the date of renewal and of paying that rent at the time of redevelopment instead of paying a modification premium, he added.

The Colonial Secretary informed the Council that certain other changes in policy which were of lesser importance than those he had just mentioned had also been formulated.

Full details of those and an explanatory statement of the new policy would be issued as soon as possible, he added.

He concluded by saying that the modifications to the policy in respect of renewable leases would involve a very substantial reduction in revenue in the ensuing years and he could only repeat what he had said in the previous debate that any reduction in revenue from that source might have to be made good from another.

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NEED TO STRENGTHEN LAW ON INSURANCE

Greater Protection For Public

Financial requirements in some of the ordinances relating to insurance will be strengthened soon to provide greater protection to the public.

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave told Legislative Council today that recent investigations had shown a need for strengthening the law at an early date.

He said a draft Bill was being prepared for submission to Executive Council. This would propose substantial increases in the present requirements as to the deposits, paid-up capital and solvency margins.

"It is intended that these provisions will take effect from today (May 24)," Mr. Haddon-Cave said.

The Financial Secretary was replying to a question from Sir Yuet-keung Kan who had asked whether Government intended to amend present legislation dealing with insurance companies and, in particular, to revise the financial requirements to be met.

The Government, he said, also intended to undertake later this year a review of the whole field of insurance legislation. A law officer, who is at present on leave in the United Kingdom, would be spending some time in the Insurance and Companies Division of the Department of Trade and Industry in preparation for this review.

/Mr. Haddon Cave

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Mr. Haddon Cave said: "The review will include an assessment of the financial requirements to be met by all insurance companies, but the interim provisions I have just announced will not affect Companies now carrying on insurance business in Hong Kong and who already comply with the existing provisions."

He said that existing insurance companies would be well advised to consider strengthening their financial position now, so that they could comply more easily with the financial requirements eventually decided upon.

For these provisions, he added, these requirements would apply to all companies no matter when they commence business.

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TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS IN LION ROCK TUNNEL

Need For Better Recovery Equipment

Government is now examining the need for more powerful recovery equipment to speed up the removal of heavy vehicles in case of traffic accidents inside the Lion Rock Tunnel.

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, stated this today in the Legislative Council in reply to a question by the Hon. Szeto Wai.

Mr. Szeto had asked: "Would Government state whether there have been delays in clearing vehicles involved in a collision inside the Lion Rock Tunnel and evacuating the persons injured and, if so, what steps are being taken to ensure that these delays do not recur?"

Mr. Haddon-Cave said that where accidents involving heavy vehicles occurred in the Tunnel, there were sometimes unavoidable delays in moving such vehicles from the Tunnel because of their size and the practical difficulties involved in shifting them in a confined space.

He told the Council that the Commissioner for Transport was conscious that every effort must be made by his Tunnel staff to avoid delays in clearing vehicles involved in a collision inside the Tunnel and evacuating injured persons.

"The operational instruction dealing with vehicle accidents in the Lion Rock Tunnel provides for the application of immediate first aid treatment to injured persons, and, if necessary, conveying them to hospital for further medical treatment as expeditiously as possible; and for the speedy clearance of damaged vehicles from the tunnel so that traffic flow is not impeded."

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As regards possible delays in evacuating injured persons, Mr. Haddon-Cave said Mr. Szeto was probably referring to an accident which occurred at 4.10 p.m. on May 1 in which a private bus collided with a private car.

He said preliminary investigations showed that Kowloon Ambulance Control received a call at 4.19 p.m. and that the injured were collected and booked into hospital by 5 p.m. The tunnel re-opened to traffic at 4.58 p.m.

The unexplained delay of nine minutes between the time the accident was logged in the Tunnel Control Centre and the time a call for an ambulance was logged at Ambulance Control was now the subject of a department enquiry, he said.

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GROUND LEVEL PARKING AND HAWKER BAZAAR

To Be Provided In San Po Kong Site

The Director of Public Works, the Hon. J.J. Robson, said today the site which lies between Yin Hing and Shung Ling Streets at San Po Kong would simply be used to provide ground level parking for cars and a hawker bazaar including cooked food stalls.

He said this would be subject to the inclusion of an appropriate item in the Public Works Programme.

He was speaking in the Legislative Council in reply to Dr. the Hon. S.Y. Chung who had asked: "Referring to a question on November 18, 1970, is Government in a position to report its findings about maximum use of a site at San Po Kong for providing space for cooked food stalls?"

Mr. Robson said the original intention was to sell the site for development as a multi-storey car park with a sale condition that space would be made available on the ground floor for use, at least in part, as a hawker bazaar including cooked food stalls.

"However, recent discussions with the Director of Fire Services have indicated that any multi-storey building exceeding a height of three storeys would result in an unacceptable fire risk since the site in question is surrounded by multi-storey residential buildings and has only limited vehicle access."

Accordingly, he said, it was now intended to abandon for the time being the idea of selling the site for a multi-storey car park.

"It is possible that at a later stage, the site could be developed to a maximum of three storeys so as to provide additional facilities of the same type," he said.

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COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO "JUMBO" FIRE

Recommendations Accepted In Principle With One Exception

Government has accepted in principle, with one exception, the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the "Jumbo" fire subject to approval of their financial implications by the Legislative Council's Finance Committee once these have been worked out.

This was stated today by the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, at the Legislative Council in a statement on the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into last October's fire on the "Jumbo" floating restaurant at Aberdeen.

Sir Hugh said the exception, in paragraph 110 (xviii), was put forward by the Commission only as an alternative to one of the other recommendations which had been accepted, and the fact that it had not been accepted was of no significance.

He pointed out that the Report did not apportion responsibility between the parties mentioned, nor did it attempt to determine their civil liabilities since the Commission thought that these were matters which should be left to the regular Courts of Law.

One of the recommendations accepted, he said, was that the Director of Marine be given overall responsibility for the supervision of working conditions on ships and floating structures being built, repaired or renovated in Colony waters and that he be given suitable powers of enforcement.

/The Commission

The Commission had made this recommendation in order to resolve doubts over the respective powers and duties of the Government departments concerned, he added.

He said the inspection of industrial undertakings of this kind outside registered dockyards was likely to be expensive, and it would take some little time to provide the necessary staff.

Sir Hugh drew attention to a paragraph of the Report in which the Commission emphasized that, in making their recommendations, they did not wish to detract in any way from the primary responsibility that the law imposed on those in actual charge of the work, that is, the shipbuilder, ship-repairer or contractor.

Adequacy

Other recommendations made by the Commission include a review of the adequacy of the single fire boat now stationed at Aberdeen, the provision of improved laboratory facilities for the testing of new materials used in construction work and wider facilities for the provisions of the Dangerous Goods Ordinance, and the possible danger of some new and untried materials.

He said plans already drawn up would cover the first two of these recommendations and the third would also be followed up.

As regards the safety of floating restaurants generally, Sir Hugh said, the Commission had noted that some of these restaurants had been in operation for many years and appeared to have clear fire records, and that it might well be that none of them currently posed any undue fire risk.

However, he said, the Commission had made one recommendation, which had been accepted, that the Marine Department should continue to be the authority for the inspection and licensing of these restaurants, but that, when issuing or renewing certificates for them, the department should take into account the requirements that the Fire Services Department would consider necessary for restaurants on land.

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NOT IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST: SAYS SIR HUGH

To Require Policemen To Remain Against Their Will

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, said today it would not be in the public interest to require existing police personnel to remain in the Force against their will.

He was replying in the Legislative Council to the Hon. Wilfred Wong.

Mr. Wong had asked: "Is Government prepared to direct immediately that uniformed Police personnel should be retained for three years beyond the normal retiring age, subject to medical fitness, so as to alleviate the serious shortage of experienced men, both rank and file and officers?"

Sir Hugh added that some applied to extend their service beyond the normal retiring age.

When considering their applications, the present need to alleviate the serious shortage of both rank and file and officers would certainly be very much in mind, he said.

In reply to a question by the Hon. Q.W. Lee, Sir Hugh said the position of ex-police officers still in occupation of departmental quarters had been examined as a result of a recent petition to His Excellency the Governor.

Proposals had been formulated which would shortly be laid before the Governor in Council, he added.

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Mr. Lee had asked: "Will Government take appropriate measures to prevent policemen and other rank and file disciplined staff housed in departmental quarters, especially those whose duties require them to be so accommodated, from becoming homeless when the time comes for them to leave those quarters upon retirement?"

Replying to yet another question by the Hon. P.C. Woo, the Colonial Secretary said the Commissioner of Police had a Working Party examining the question of utilising civilian personnel not only in the traffic branch but in other branches of the Police Force.

He added that the Commissioner would make recommendations to him when the Working Party's findings were submitted.

The Hon. P.C. Woo had asked: "Are there any duties performed by the uniformed personnel of the Police Traffic Branch which could be performed by civilians? If so, will Government recruit additional civilian staff and release uniformed personnel for proper Police duties?"

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FOUR BILLS PASSED IN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

After Committee Stage And Third Reading

Four bills passed their committee stage and third readings in Legislative Council this afternoon and became law.

They were the University of Hong Kong (Amendment) Bill 1972; the Pharmacy and Poisons (Amendment) Bill 1972; the Legal Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 1972, and the Matrimonial Causes (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 1972.

The Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Bill 1972 had its first and second readings, and debate resumed on the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 1972.

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RECORDING OF LEGCO PROCEEDINGS

Available For Listening

Note to Editors: Proceedings of this afternoon's Legislative Council meeting have been recorded.

You are welcome to consult the tapes at the G.I.S. Press Room.

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OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL PRESENTATION CEREMONY

Lady MacLehose Addresses 40 "Pioneers"

Lady MacLehose said today that in recent years, women had achieved some remarkable feats of daring and endurance.

She cited the examples of Nicolette Milnes-Walker sailing the Atlantic alone last year, Sylvia Cook rowing for 12 months across the Pacific, and Japanese women climbing in the Himalayas.

She was speaking at a presentation ceremony of certificates and badges to 40 girls who had completed a training course of 26 days at the Outward Bound School of Hong Kong.

Lady MacLehose described the girls as "pioneers" because they were the first group of young women to undertake an Outward Bound Course in Hong Kong.

The following is the full text of Lady MacLehose's speech at the presentation ceremony:-

"I feel slightly diffident today addressing 40 pioneers, for pioneers you certainly are as the first group of young women to undertake an Outward Bound Course here in Hong Kong.

"When the idea of running a women's course was first proposed, it was thought that not more than 20 volunteers would apply. The young women of Hong Kong are to be congratulated since 40, double the estimated number, signed on. This is indeed encouraging for all concerned, promoters, sponsors and participants.

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"You have I understand, completed virtually the same course during your 26 days here, as the boys do, and this will have meant that you will have had to forego many of the comforts and luxuries of everyday life. You will also have been subjected to the discipline and rules that are necessary when a group of people live or work together.

"Whilst I am sure you all now feel - and rightly so - confident of being capable of tackling any situation that may arise, I hope your desire to equal, if not go one better than the men, will not make you lose any of your feminine charm. Indeed you all look attractive and well turned-out, in spite, I am sure, of having to miss visits to your hairdresser or manicurist or dressmaker during the last few weeks.

"It is true, and very commendable that in recent years women have achieved some remarkable feats of daring and endurance. For example Nicolette Milnes-Walker sailed the Atlantic alone last year; Sylvia Cook rowed for twelve months across the Pacific. Then there are the tremendous successes experienced by Japanese women climbing in the Himalayas.

"Doubtless, despite the recent bad weather, with these examples, and the experience gained from some of the tasks you have been given on this course, your pioneering instincts will have been so encouraged that you now feel fit in both body and spirit to climb every mountain or sail any sea.

"However, as a wife and mother, I would remind you of an old Danish saying, that the quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach - and I hope that you are all as efficient with your cooking pots as you are with a coil of rope or in a boat. Then indeed your husbands and families when you have them, will have all the luck."

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COOKED-FOOD BAZAAR FOR WESTERN

A vacant piece of land 2,000 square feet in area, adjacent to Heung Hing Lane in the Western District, will soon be developed into a cooked-food bazaar.

A spokesman for the Urban Services Department said today Heung Hing Lane is accessible for pedestrians only from Bonham Strand West and Queen's Road West.

When developed, it will accommodate about twelve stalls.

The whole area will be given a three-inch concrete cement paving. Surface drainage and water supply will also be provided.

Food-stall owners who have obtained licences to operate in the bazaar will build their own stall covers.

The purpose of this project is to enable the Urban Services Department to have better control over cooked-food bazaars.

Construction is expected to begin in early July and should take about two months to complete.

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Release Time: 8.30 p.m.