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Anonymous allegations of abuses in prisons refuted

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The Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Raymond Lai Ming-kee, said today (Friday) that the Correctional Services Department (CSD) could only be more forthcoming with details of the recent attacks on penal institutions once the police investigation is concluded.

Speaking to reporters after a passing-out parade in which 136 officers graduated from CSD, Mr Lai said the department would remain on high alert following the attacks.

"The police investigation is still ongoing and we are continuing to assist them in their enquiries through intelligence sharing.

"I cannot comment either on the current progress of the investigation, or whether any of the rumours published in the press recently are true," said Mr Lai.

The Commissioner noted that in the past two weeks, a number of allegations had been made by anonymous persons to the press about what they considered to be abuses.

On the use of sedatives, Mr Lai said they were administered at the direction of the Medical Officer seconded from the Department of Health or the psychiatrist seconded from the Hospital Authority.

"The role of CSD staff who are trained in nursing duties, including psychiatric nursing duties at Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, is to present the patient and his condition to the doctor, record immediately the course of action prescribed by the doctor and, if appropriate, administer any medication in accordance with instructions given by the doctor.

"This sequence of events is identical to that which would occur in a hospital or a clinic and is a matter of medical, not correctional practice," Mr Lai said.

The Commissioner said he was also aware of the allegations, again made by anonymous persons, concerning the alleged unfairness of complaints procedure.

"As is often the case with anonymous complainants, there is no way of verifying the details of what they say. However, in the case of 'Gary' whose claims appeared in a leading newspaper, he was such a well-known character that his identity was instantly recognisable by us.

"He was a habitual complainant who made 35 complaints to our Complaints Investigation Unit (CIU), Justices of the Peace, the Office of the Commissioner for Administrative Complaints (COMAC), the Legislative Council and even to the then British Prime Minister Mrs Margaret Thatcher during his time at Shek Pik Prison.

"He seems hardly likely to make such complaints if he feels he will be victimised by staff as a result," Mr Lai said.

The Commissioner said CIU was but one channel by which prisoners could air their complaints.

"They can approach a visiting Justice of the Peace at any time on his rounds, and even request a private discussion. They can petition the Governor, write to COMAC, LegCo or anyone else they feel might be able to help them.

"They can even complain about the way CIU cases have been conducted to these bodies if they wish," Mr Lai added, noting that there were so many channels of complaints outside the control of CSD.

The number of CIU cases in 1995 was 171, up 11 per cent from 154 in 1994 and 80 per cent from 95 in 1993. The number of cases substantiated was seven in 1993, 11 in 1994 and nine in 1995.

Mr Lai pointed out that if CIU was held in such low regard and so distrusted, the number of complaints would not increase.

"The rise in complaints is due to the greater awareness among inmates of their right to complain," he said.

"The low substantiation rate is due to the fact that there are so many trivial issues brought up as a ruse to get out of some other form of trouble. Yet where we have substantial evidence to support a complaint we will take action against the staff involved," Mr Lai explained.

On accusations of staff gambling on duty, the Commissioner said these allegations were complete nonsense.

"No member of staff has been found to be gambling on duty either with prisoners or other staff," Mr Lai said.

As for the allegation that the gambling takes place at night, he said this was simply ridiculous.

"Moving from one location to another, without authority, even for a chat, is an offence punishable under discipline. How could staff get together to gamble?" he asked.

"These allegations have been made up by someone who has never been in a prison because the person clearly has no idea of how the system works," he added, noting that the person who had made the claims now states he was misquoted.

Mr Lai said gambling among prisoners was prevalent and that the department had disciplined 338 prisoners over the past six months for involvement in gambling or gambling-related activities.

"Of these, 23 were known to have been involved in running large gambling syndicates and in each case, severe action is taken against prisoners found involved with punishments that include solitary confinement, loss of privilege and loss of remission," he said.

The Commissioner also refuted suggestions that some staff had been indebted to the CSD Credit Union because of gambling.

"A degree of hysteria appears to have entered the discussions with someone claiming that 45 per cent of CSD Credit Union members were in debt. Of course they are. It is a Credit Union whose aim is to encourage thrift and self-help; if no-one owed it money it would cease to function -- the same goes for a bank," Mr Lai pointed out.

"This really has little to do with gambling. There are cases of people getting into very serious trouble with indebtedness, though more often than not it is bad investments, family problems and the like which cause the debt rather than gambling.

"We constantly monitor all staff in serious indebtedness. They are required to formulate a plan to repay the debts and will be held to it, and the potential for corruption is recognised and special steps are taken to guard against it."

End

Veterinary surgeons to be registered

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The Veterinary Surgeons Registration Bill, which aims to regulate the practice of veterinary surgery in Hong Kong, is gazetted today (Friday).

At present, a person who wishes to practise veterinary surgery in Hong Kong needs to be a member of the United Kingdom's Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons before he can obtain and use the antibiotics, poisons and other controlled drugs necessary to practise the profession.

However, it is believed that there are also some unqualified persons practising as veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong. Veterinary treatment administered by unqualified persons may be expected to cause suffering to animals.

There are now 93 qualified veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong, of whom 71 are engaged in private practice. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons exercises disciplinary control over the professional conduct of its members, but faces practical difficulties in intervening effectively from the United Kingdom in professional disputes involving the practice of veterinary surgery by its members in Hong Kong.

These problems point to a need for a locally-based statutory regime of professional standards and disciplinary control for veterinary surgeons in the interests of animal welfare, the veterinary profession itself and consumer protection.

Under the Bill, a registration system for veterinary surgeons will be established.

A Veterinary Surgeons Board consisting of 10 persons to be appointed by the Secretary for Economic Services - namely, a chairman, six persons who are veterinary surgeons and three persons who are medical practitioners or pharmacists or representative of the interests of persons who utilise veterinary services, will be set up.

The Board will have the power to:

- * establish and maintain a register of registered veterinary surgeons,
- * set and review the qualification standards for registration as a "registered veterinary surgeon",
- * examine and verify the qualifications of persons who apply for registration as registered veterinary surgeons,

- * receive, examine, accept or reject applications for registration and renewal of registration as a registered veterinary surgeon, and
- * issue a code of practice, make rules for the professional conduct and discipline of registered veterinary surgeons and deal with disciplinary offences.

The Bill restricts the use of the description "registered veterinary surgeon" to those qualified to use it.

The Bill also provides for criminal offences relating to false representation and practising veterinary surgery without being registered, with a maximum penalty on conviction of a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year.

A spokesman for the Economic Services Branch said the proposals had been drawn up at the request of, and in consultation with, the profession.

The spokesman said the proposals would open the way for persons holding veterinary qualifications other than membership of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to practise as veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong provided that these qualifications were accepted by the Veterinary Surgeons Board (once it is established) as meeting its qualification standards for registration as a "registered veterinary surgeon".

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on May 15.

End

Chemical waste treatment charges revised

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The Governor-in-Council has approved that regulations should be made under the Waste Disposal Ordinance to revise charges for the use of services provided by the Chemical Waste Treatment Centre (CWTC) on Tsing Yi.

The fee revision will take account of the rise in operation costs according to the movement of the Consumer Price Index (B) and the declared policy that the charging levels will be increased gradually with a view to recovering the full variable operating cost (VOC) over a period of eight years after the charging scheme was introduced last year.

This is to enable chemical waste producers sufficient time to factor the disposal charges into their production cost.

A spokesman for the Planning, Environment and Lands Branch said: "The proposed revision will increase the VOC recovery rate from 20 per cent to 25 per cent.

"This means the Government will still bear 75 per cent of the VOC as well as the fixed operating cost and capital cost.

"The revisions represent a fee increase of about 35 per cent. We believe it strikes a reasonable balance among the impact on waste producers, the disincentive to use the CWTC and the requirements of the polluter pays principle.

"We do not expect the revised charges to pose a significant burden on industries because we estimate that the present level of disposal charges represent a very small portion of the operating cost of the affected industries.

"The operation of the CWTC is not a monopoly and the use of its services is not compulsory.

"Chemical waste producers can alternatively use their own treatment facilities on site or services of other licensed waste disposal facilities."

The registration of chemical waste producers and the trip-ticket system would enable the Environmental Protection Department to identify improper disposal practices and take necessary enforcement action, he said.

Details of the adjustments are listed in the Waste Disposal (Charges for Disposal of Chemical Waste) (Amendment) Regulation 1996 gazetted today (Friday).

It is intended that the new charges will come into effect on June 28.

End

Noise emission control on vehicles

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The Government intends to impose noise emission standards on vehicles on first registration with effect from August 1 as a further measure to reduce traffic noise on the roads.

The new requirement, which will enable Hong Kong to keep up with international standards and prevent vehicles emitting excessive noise from being imported into Hong Kong, is set out in the Noise Control (Motor Vehicles) Regulation gazetted today (Friday).

The existing vehicle fleet will not be affected. The noise emission standards will only apply to vehicles to be registered first time in Hong Kong on or after August 1.

The allowable noise level will be set at 77 dB(A) for a private car and 84 dB(A) for a large truck during acceleration, both measured at a 7.5-metre distance.

A spokesman for the Planning, Environment and Lands Branch said: "New vehicles imported into Hong Kong from Japan and European countries should be able to meet the statutory requirement without difficulty. These countries accounted for a great majority of the vehicles imported for local use."

He noted that some of the new vehicles imported from places other than these countries may need to adapt the vehicle design or install noise mitigation devices in order to meet the statutory standards.

Used motor vehicles imported into Hong Kong on or after August 1 will have to undergo a simple noise test in order to ensure they meet the required standards. This will only lead to a marginal increase in arrival cost as most of them are high-end vehicles.

The new legislation, if enacted, will bring about a slight reduction of traffic noise in a few years when the existing fleet is largely replaced by new vehicles which comply with the stringent noise standards.

The new requirement will not apply to special purpose vehicles, motor tricycles, village vehicles, and vehicles that cannot travel above 50 km per hour.

The Regulation was endorsed by the Advisory Council on the Environment. The Motor Traders Association, major bus companies, the Hong Kong Motor Cycle Association, the Hong Kong Motor Cycle Chamber of Commerce, and vehicle manufacturers had also been extensively consulted and generally supported the proposal.

End

Seminar to consult HK trade on WTO agenda

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The Trade Department will be holding a seminar next Thursday (May 9) to inform Hong Kong's business sector of the issues under consideration for inclusion in the agenda of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) first Ministerial Conference scheduled for December in Singapore, and to hear their views.

Entitled "Trade Liberalisation Seminar - Hong Kong Business and the WTO Agenda", the seminar is being organised in co-operation with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong and the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce.

The Secretary for Trade and Industry, Miss Denise Yue, will open the seminar which will be held between 9 am and 12.45 pm at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Announcing details of the seminar, the Deputy Director-General of Trade, Mr Tam Wing-pong said today (Friday): "Hong Kong is a staunch supporter of the WTO multilateral trading system as a cornerstone of our trade policy. The multilateral principles of non-discrimination, national treatment and transparency provide a level playing field for international trade which best serves Hong Kong's trade interest.

"As an active participant in the WTO, we attach great importance to the Singapore Ministerial Conference (SMC) where the future direction of the WTO will be defined."

Mr Tam said in preparing for the SMC, the Trade Department had been reviewing Hong Kong's priorities and concerns to identify areas in the WTO agreements and new issues which should be included in the future agenda.

"For the purpose of formulating Hong Kong's agenda for the SMC, we would like to hear the views of the business community before formally finalising Hong Kong's position," he added.

Mr Tam said on the basis of views expressed so far in various fora, a tentative outline of the SMC agenda was gradually emerging as follows:-

- * The SMC should be the occasion to take stock of the implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements;

- * The SMC should review the unfinished business of the Uruguay Round i.e. the four extended track of service negotiations of financial services, movement of natural persons, basic telecommunications and maritime transport;
- * Ministers should review the report of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment (CTE) and to decide on the future programme for the work of the CTE on trade and environment;
- * The SMC should take a decision on which of the new issues (e.g. investment, competition) are mature for negotiations within the WTO; and
- * Ministers should decide on the programme for further liberalisation by way of, for example, tariff reductions, acceleration of UR commitments and breaking down of trade and non-trade-related barriers.

"Bearing this in mind, our forthcoming Trade Liberalisation Seminar will provide a golden opportunity for government officials, people in the business sector and academics to exchange views on their expectations for the SMC and the future WTO agenda," Mr Tam said.

The half-day seminar will in the main comprise three sessions to focus discussions on the traditional GATT issues, the UR-introduced issues and new issues, followed by a round-up session by the Director-General of Trade, Mr Tony Miller.

Speakers at the first session will be Managing Director, Fang Brothers Knitting Limited, Mr Kenneth Fang, and the Government's legal consultant in Europe, Mr Jean Francois Bellis. They will speak on textiles and clothing, and anti-dumping respectively.

The second session will feature four speakers. Chairman of Hong Kong Coalition of Service Industries, Mr Brian Stevenson, and Representative of US Coalition of Service Industries Inc, Mr Charlie Heeter, will address issues relating to trade in services. Two other speakers, Senior Partner of Robert W H Wang and Co, Ms Anna Wu, and Director, Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management, University of Hong Kong, Professor Peter Hills, will focus on intellectual property rights and trade and the environment.

Talks by Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Consumer Council, Mrs Pamela Chan, on trade and competition, and by Managing Director of Hopewell Holdings Ltd, Mr Gordon Wu, on trade and investment will be featured in the third session.

The Executive Director of Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Mr Michael Sze, will be the seminar chairman.

The seminar is open to members of the Hong Kong's business community. However, in view of limited seating capacity, enrolments will be accepted on a first-come-first-served basis. For enrolment and enquiries, please contact the Multilateral Division of the Trade Department on 2398 5691.

End

Amended town planning law enacted

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The Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance 1996, which introduces three technical amendments to the Town Planning Ordinance, was enacted today (Friday).

"The first amendment clarifies that a judge, who shall only come from the High Court or below, may be appointed to the Town Planning Appeal Board (TPAB) panel," a spokesman for the Town Planning Board said.

The second one provides that the Governor may appoint more than one Deputy Chairman to the TPAB panel.

The spokesman said another provision of the Ordinance stipulated that a TPAB should be presided by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the TPAB panel.

"The second amendment will therefore enhance the efficiency in processing planning appeals as additional appeal boards may sit simultaneously," he added.

The last amendment clarifies the nature of a continuing offence in respect of an unauthorised development under section 23(6) of the Town Planning Ordinance.

"It removes the ambiguity on how the daily fines shall be charged for such continuing offence," said the spokesman.

End

Tenders invited for slope upgrading work

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The Civil engineering Department is inviting tenders for upgrading 18 slopes and retaining walls throughout the territory under its accelerated landslip preventive measures (LPM) programme.

The works are expected to commence in August for completion in 18 months.

Of these 18 slopes, nine are under the maintenance of Highways Department and nine are with Architectural Services Department.

Chief Geotechnical Engineer of the department's Geotechnical Engineering Office, Mr Allan Watkins, pointed out that the contract would be the second to be let under the current fiscal year and the seventh to be offered under the accelerated LPM programme which commenced in April last year.

"A total of six contracts are expected to be let this year," he said.

Under the programme, the upgrading works to government-owned man-made slopes in the 1977 Slope Catalogue would be completed by the year 2000.

"Studies of private slopes and retaining walls have also been accelerated considerably and about 300 slopes will be studied this year.

"A statutory notice will be served by the Buildings Department requiring owners to carry out upgrading works if a slope or a retaining wall is identified by the studies as not meeting the required standards," Mr Watkins added.

Tender forms for the slope upgrading works contract and further particulars can be obtained from Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick (HK) Limited, 38th floor, Metroplaza Tower 1, 223 Hing Fong Road, Kwai Fong, New Territories.

Tender offers will close at noon on May 31.

End

Tenders invited for minor works contract

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The Territory Development Department is inviting tenders for the department's Term Contract for Minor Works for 1996-1998.

The scope of works includes construction of various types of minor items of engineering works relating to the projects under the management of the department. The projects are located throughout the territory including restricted areas and outlying islands.

The two-year term contract will start in June. The works will be designed and supervised by the Regional Development Offices of the department.

Details of the tender are contained in the Government Gazette published today (Friday).

Tender forms and further particulars may be obtained from the New Territories West Development Office, 25th floor, Tsuen Wan Government Offices, 38 Sai Lau Kok Road, Tsuen Wan, New Territories.

Tenders must be clearly marked and addressed to the Chairman of the Central Tender Board. They must be placed in the Government Secretariat Tender Box in the lift lobby of the lower ground floor, Central Government Offices (East Wing), Lower Albert Road, Hong Kong before noon on Friday, May 24.

Late tenders will not be accepted.

End

Tenders invited for two construction projects

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The Architectural Services Department is inviting tenders for two construction projects for the Regional Council.

The first project relates to the construction of a two-storey air-conditioned market in Peng Chau.

The contract will also include the design and construction of piling works for Peng Chau Market, which will have a total floor area of about 1,600 square metres.

Works will commence in August for completion in January 1998.

The other project is for the renovation of entrance halls and public areas and provision of air-conditioning to seven Regional Council indoor recreation centres.

Works will also start in August for completion in April next year.

Tender forms and further particulars of both projects can be obtained from the Architectural Services Department, 34th floor, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong.

Tender offers for the Peng Chau Market and the recreation centres will close at noon on May 31 and 24 respectively.

End

Over 9,600 agreements lodged with Land Registry in April

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A total of 9,606 sale and purchase agreements for building units, including both residential and non-residential properties, were lodged with the Land Registry last month.

The figure represents a decrease of 19.4 per cent from that of March this year, and a decrease of 25.9 per cent when compared with April last year.

The total consideration of these agreements in the month is \$29.54 billion, down 21.1 per cent and 21.6 per cent when compared with the amounts for March 1996 and April 1995 respectively.

The figures are contained in the monthly statistics released today (Friday) by the Land Registry on deeds relating to property transactions received for registration in the Urban and New Territories Land Registries last month.

Relevant statistics for March 1996 and April 1995 were provided for comparison. Figures on sale and purchase agreements received for the past 12 months and the year-on-year rate of change were also released.

These statistics generally relate to land transactions executed up to four weeks prior to their submission for registration, as there is usually a time lag between the execution of deeds and their lodgement for registration.

End

Survey on housing aspiration

The Planning Department today (Friday) signed an agreement commissioning a firm to conduct a survey on housing aspiration of the community.

"The survey will identify the housing preference including housing type, location, flat size and ownership of various socio-economic groups," a spokesman for the Department said.

"Information will be collected from a total of 12,000 randomly selected households.

"Findings of the survey will be used to assess the housing needs of the territory," he added.

The survey will take about nine months to complete.

End

Sub-contractor served summonses for late payment of wages

The Labour Department has issued five summonses to a sub-contractor for suspected late payment of wages to a group of imported workers from China in November last year.

The sub-contractor, Success Civil and Foundation Company Limited, was engaged in the works contract of the Airport Passenger Terminal Building.

The summonses were served under Section 23 of the Employment Ordinance, stipulating that wages shall become due on the expiry of the last day of the wage period and shall be paid as soon as practicable but in any case not later than seven days thereafter. The maximum penalty for each summons is \$200,000 and imprisonment for one year.

The five summonses will be presented for hearing in Eastern Magistracy on May 27.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	<u>\$ million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	2,049	0930	+350
Closing balance in the account	2,050	1000	+350
Change attributable to :		1100	+350
Money market activity	+346	1200	+350
LAF today	-345	1500	+350
		1600	+346

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.6 *-0.2* 3.5.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.89	2 years	2802	5.16	98.31	6.27
1 month	5.01	3 years	3904	6.30	99.08	6.76
3 months	5.19	5 years	5103	6.75	97.73	7.44
6 months	5.32	7 years	7302	6.02	91.17	7.86
12 months	5.68	5 years	M502	7.30	99.14	7.67

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$17,508 million

Closed May 3, 1996

End