



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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FS: Airport Core Programme in full swing

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The Financial Secretary, Sir Hamish Macleod, said today (Monday) that the Government would approach the Finance Committee for additional funding for the new airport this month as construction work on the Airport Core Programme (ACP) would be in full swing this year.

"The Government has now obtained 90 per cent of the funding required for the seven Government projects in the ACP and will ask the Finance Committee for a further \$2.43 billion for the construction of Government facilities at the new airport later this month."

"We also intend to approach the Finance Committee for some \$5.2 billion as the balance of equity funding for the new airport early this year," he added.

Sir Hamish pointed out that more major contracts would be awarded in the next few months for the construction of the passenger terminal building and for the terminal's building services.

Other major contracts, including those for airfield works, would be let as the year progressed.

A total of 102 major contracts worth over \$65 billion had been awarded so far for the 10 projects in the ACP.

Sir Hamish was satisfied with the significant developments in funding arrangements and construction work relating to the new airport in the past year.

"The signing of the Sino-British Agreed Minute which sets out the debt and equity levels for the Provisional Airport Authority (PAA) and the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC) was an important step forward for the ACP.

"Approval by the Sino-British Land Commission for the allocation of all the necessary land for the airport and the Airport Railway was another encouraging development," he said.

Looking ahead, the Financial Secretary hoped that an early agreement on the Financial Support Agreements for the PAA and the MTRC could be reached between British and Chinese experts. An early agreement on the Airport Bill and the airport franchises would also be needed.

"Our experts have been discussing these matters with their Chinese side counterparts in a friendly and positive manner and we hope an agreement will be reached as soon as possible so that the PAA and MTRC can launch their borrowing programmes to support their works," he reiterated.

Commenting on cost control, the Financial Secretary said the Government would keep up its efforts in taking the ACP forward with a stringent and fair approach to letting contracts in order to benefit from the highly competitive bids internationally.

He believed that the Airport Consultative Committee and the Legislative Council also had an important role to play in monitoring costs and progress of the programme. They would continue to be updated and consulted regularly.

"The public can rest assured that the funds committed on the ACP will prove to be a sound investment underpinning Hong Kong's economic development in the next century."

On the progress of construction work on the ACP, Sir Hamish saw for himself during a year-end visit to Chek Lap Kok the completion of 82 per cent of the airport platform and at the Lantau Fixed Crossing 65 per cent completion of the Tsing Ma Bridge.

He also noted that foundation work for the passenger terminal building was almost completed and the contract for building the superstructure would be let soon.

Sir Hamish, who is also chairman of the PAA, was accompanied on his visit last Friday by the Secretary for Works, Mr James Blake; the Director of the New Airport Projects Co-ordination Office, Mr Billy Lam; and the Chief Executive Officer of the PAA, Dr Henry Townsend.

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Code of practice advises on prevention of Legionnaires' disease

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The Prevention of Legionnaires' Disease Committee has recently produced a code of practice on the prevention of the disease.

The publication was prepared by the committee with reference to similar codes overseas, such as those in Australia, United Kingdom and Singapore.

The code of practice explains the background of the problem and the medical aspects of the disease, and provides detailed guidelines on prevention in cases concerning cooling towers, condensate pans, centralised fresh water systems and other water systems.

It recommends the practices to be followed in the design, installation, operation and maintenance of air-conditioning and water systems, especially cooling towers and centralised hot water supply systems, for the effective control and prevention of the disease.

Bacteria of Legionnaires' disease are active in poorly maintained fresh water cooling towers and centralised hot/cold water supply systems.

People could get the disease by inhaling air-borne droplets or particles in fine mist containing the bacteria. The bacteria will then pass into the lungs.

A spokesman for the committee said today (Monday) that the code of practice should be followed by all architects, engineers, building owners and building managers, as well as the Government.

However, he stressed that the disease was not common in Hong Kong.

"Only a few cases have been recorded in the territory in recent years.

"However, these episodic few should not be taken lightly," the spokesman cautioned.

He pointed out that the Government was concerned about the disease, and as living standards and quality of life in Hong Kong keep on rising, more people expect the Government to devote more resources and effort in safeguarding public health.

"The Government is taking a prudent and preventive approach by establishing in 1985 the committee to formulate strategies in preventing and dealing with possible outbreak of the disease," he said.

He pointed out that the Government hoped that the code of practice would be widely adopted by building and factory owners, building services engineers, practitioners in facility maintenance and other related agencies.

"Through the co-operation of all those concerned to follow the code of practice, the Government is confident that every citizen will enjoy good health without the fear of a spread of the Legionnaires' disease in Hong Kong," the spokesman said.

Copies of the code of practice have been distributed to management of hotels, hospitals, air-conditioning contractors, developers and the Institution of Engineers.

Members of the public who wish to get a copy of the leaflet or more information on the prevention of the disease may write to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department in Room 514, 98 Caroline Hill Road, Causeway Bay, or call the Legionnaires' Disease hotline 2808 3696 and fax 2895 0264.

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Employers' support sought for mother tongue education

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The Education Department has written to several major employers' associations to explain the Government's policy for medium of instruction in schools as part of its effort to promote mother tongue teaching.

The department believes that through the understanding and support of employers, any parental worries about the effect of mother tongue teaching on students' employment opportunities can be dispelled.

The correspondence with employers' associations was supplemented by research findings that supported the merits of mother tongue education.

An Education Department spokesman said at the request of a major employers' association, a talk has been arranged at the end of January to introduce the subject and answer queries from members.

The department explained in its correspondence with employers' associations that the Government's policy was to encourage secondary schools to adopt Chinese as the teaching medium; to allow schools to choose an appropriate medium of instruction; and to urge schools to adopt a single teaching medium, either Chinese or English, rather than using a mixed code in teaching.

Opportunity is also given to those students who have the ability to learn through the English medium should they so wish.

Among the material sent to employers' associations, a study of the academic achievements of more than 4,500 Secondary 3 students showed that in the heavily language-loaded subjects of Science, History and Geography, students taught in Chinese performed better than their counterparts taught in a mixed code of Chinese and English.

The mean scores of tests at Secondary 3 level for students taught in Chinese were: Science (40.52); History (24.89); and Geography (49.13). These compare with mean scores of 27.73, 17.03 and 41.87 respectively for students in schools using mixed-code as the medium of instruction.

The study found that in a school language environment that is more Chinese than English, students generally were more academically motivated, and were more likely to commit themselves to learning and to try to understand their school tasks rather than just to meet their teachers' requirements.

Their counterparts in the English medium schools who were not competent in English tended to learn by rote memorising, focusing only on selected details. They were more anxious in their studies.

The results clearly suggested that students of low English competence should not be placed in a language environment that is predominantly English.

Otherwise, they are likely to have poor motivation and to apply superficial learning strategies like rote memorisation to deal with the secondary school curriculum, especially in studying language-loaded subjects.

Another survey of 2,502 students, the findings of which were also sent to the employers' associations, indicated that pupils in schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction in all subjects did better in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination than those in schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction by subject.

The employer associations learned that a third survey on 2,380 Secondary 1 students found almost half of them (49.5 per cent) had difficulties with subjects taught in English while 67.1 per cent thought they would learn better if lessons were conducted in Chinese.

Only 15 per cent of teachers teaching Secondary 1 classes considered that the pupils had the required language proficiency for English medium teaching. Sixty-six per cent of parents of Secondary 1 pupils thought their children had difficulties in understanding textbooks written in English.

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Speedpost pick-up service covers whole New Territories

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The Postmaster General, Mr Mike Pagliari, announced today (Monday) that the Speedpost pick-up service would be extended to the whole New Territories on January 16.

"The New Territories is no longer a remote rural area. It is full of new towns, industrial estates and suburban residential areas," Mr Pagliari said.

"The postal service must keep pace with the development of Hong Kong, as it has for the last 154 years.

"The extension of the Speedpost pick-up service to the whole of the New Territories is intended to meet the needs of industrial and commercial concerns in the region," he added.

Speedpost is the courier service operated by the Post Office for the speedy transmission of documents, samples and merchandise overseas.

For regular users of the service, the Post Office provides a pick-up service to collect Speedpost items at the sender's premises on his telephone order.

Same day collection service is provided for telephone orders placed before 3.30 pm.

The pick-up service has until now been provided for Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and Tsuen Wan and Sha Tin in the New Territories.

Reciprocal Speedpost service is available to 70 overseas destinations.

Further enquiries about the service can be made of the Postal Services Representatives on tel 2921 2277.

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Customs to elect best counter staff

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To give recognition to counter staff who have provided quality services, the Customs and Excise Department is inviting the public to pick its best counter staff between January 3 and February 28.

Counter staff can be nominated for awards according to five categories of merits - whether they are courteous, eager to help, efficient, friendly and knowledgeable.

"To ensure fairness, members of the public are requested not to cast more than one vote for the same staff member. The department will select five voters in a lucky draw to receive a souvenir," a spokesman for the department said today (Monday).

"Five officers who obtain the largest number of votes will be given the Best Counter Staff Awards and the office with the largest number of votes per member of counter staff will be given the Best Counter Team Award," he said.

Nomination forms are available at the following offices:

- * 2/F & 7/F, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong

- * G/F, Middle Road, Multi-storey Carpark Building, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon
- * 10/F, Canton Road Government Offices, Kowloon
- * Room 10, 9/F, MTL Building, Phase I, Container Port Road, Kwai Chung, New Territories
- * Room 5002, G/F, Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminal I, Hong Kong International Airport, Concorde Road, Hong Kong
- * Room 3002, New Hall, G/F, Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminal I, Hong Kong International Airport, Concorde Road, Hong Kong
- * Room 224 & Room 443, Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminal II, Hong Kong International Airport, Concorde Road, Hong Kong

Members of the public are requested to fill in the nomination forms and put them in the collection boxes located in the waiting halls of the offices. The forms can also be sent to the department by fax 2541 7828.

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