



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Transcript of Governor's media session

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Following is the transcript of the media session by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, after visiting victims of the Pat Sin Range hill fire at the Prince of Wales Hospital today (Saturday):—

Governor: When my wife and I heard about today's appalling accident, we wanted to come to the hospital to offer our sympathy to the parents and families of those who have been injured and to thank the medical staff who are giving such marvellous treatment to the casualties of today's disaster. We've seen the parents and met the medical staff in the Intensive Care Unit where six of the children are receiving treatment and also met the staff and in the Burns Unit where two of the children are receiving treatment. One other casualty is in the neuro surgery department and I think one other in serious condition. As you would expect the teams looking after these young people are working flat out, giving them the best possible, most professional attention. I am sure the whole community will be grateful for that. I would like to offer my sympathy not only to the relatives and families of those who have been injured, but my condolences to those who've been bereaved, who have lost loved ones. It's been an awful disaster. we will obviously want, in the days and weeks ahead, to learn any lessons that may be required to try to avoid anything like this happening again. But, of course, it's impossible to rule out every accident in life. The Education Department produce guidelines every year, covering school outings like this. We will have to see whether more is required. What I think is important that all the parents and families of the injured should know is that they will receive all the support that is required and they won't need to worry about the treatment which their children are receiving. I know the whole community will be joining me in thanking the medical staff and in offering sympathy to the injured and their families.

Question: What lessons are to be learned in this accident?

Governor: Look, this has just happened. It doesn't make very much sense for any of us whether Government, Fire Service, doctors, Education Department, Governor or journalists to start jumping to conclusions. We've got to, first of all, deal with the poor children and teachers and so on who have been affected by this disaster and then in due course you would expect us, in the most open way, to try to find out whether there are lessons for us to learn. But it would be grossly irresponsible for anyone to try jumping to conclusions within hours of this disaster when we don't even know all the facts, when there is still one person missing and one was still not sure about the condition of another victim who has been brought into the hospital.

Question: Were you face to face to talk with the parents?

Governor: Yes.

Question: What are their response?

Governor: They are as disturbed and upset as you or I would be.

End

Consultancy for MPF legislation appointed

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The Government has appointed a consortium to undertake a 12-month consultancy for the development of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) subsidiary legislation.

The consortium, headed by Watson Wyatt and comprising Price Waterhouse and State Street, will provide a team of 10 consultants including auditors, actuaries, solicitors, trustees, custodians and investment managers with expertise and experience in retirement schemes business.

They will work closely with the civil service staff of the MPF Office to be established shortly.

Signing the agreement with the consortium today (Saturday), Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and Director of the soon-to-be set up MPF Office, Mrs Pamela Tan, said: "The Government is committed to completing the MPF legislation by 1996, which means we will have to adhere to a very tight time frame.

"The consultants are expected to commence work from next week and draw up proposals on key issues for incorporation in the MPF subsidiary legislation.

"The consultants will also be required to make operational proposals necessary for the MPF Authority and service providers when implementing the MPF System."

Earlier on November 24 last year, the Government had successfully bided a sum of \$22 million from the Legislative Council Finance Committee for the engagement of consultants to provide the MPF Office with technical support for the development of the MPF subsidiary legislation.

Its request for creation of civil service posts for the MPF Office was withdrawn from the Establishment Sub-Committee of the Finance Committee on December 13 in the light of comments by LegCo members.

The revised proposal was passed at yesterday's Finance Committee.

"Now that we have all the resources at hand, we can proceed with the drafting work at full swing," Mrs Tan said.

"We aim to submit to the Legislative Council our draft subsidiary legislation by end 1996," she added.

Altogether 36 consultancy firms were invited for the project and the Wyatt team was selected out of the three groups which had submitted detailed proposals.

End

Home Affairs Department embarks on new initiatives

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Since the re-organisation of Home Affairs Department (HAD) in December 1994, the department has embarked on a number of new initiatives to serve the community, the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Shelley Lau, said today (Saturday).

At a meet-the-media session to review the work of the department, Mrs Lau said: "One of the key initiatives is to support and boost District Administration."

A series of programmes and activities have been planned in conjunction with 18 district boards to raise the profile of district administration. These include a project to promote tourism in 18 districts, a DB chairmen visit to Macau, an 18-district health competition and activities to celebrate the 15th anniversary of district administration in November 1996.

Another new initiative, Mrs Lau said, was to implement strategies, both short-term and long-term, to address problems relating to bedspace apartments.

These include regular visits by the Director and her staff to bedspace apartments to ensure the building and fire safety of these premises.

As a long-term solution, Mrs Lau introduced the purpose-built singleton hostel which would be built in Shun Ning Road to provide accommodation for 600 people. The project is making good progress and is expected to complete on target in mid-1998. Concurrently, the department continues to purchase suitable premises in different districts for conversion into singleton hostels.

In the meantime, HAD is distributing to bedspace apartment lodgers a "telephone contact card", providing them with telephone numbers of government departments concerned in case of need.

Deputy Director, Mr Lee Lap-sun, said HAD was also serving the community in a concrete manner by vigorously carrying out projects under the Rural Planning and Improvement Strategy (RPIS).

"Fifty-one projects costing \$131 million are now under construction and more will be done next year," he added.

Following the Governor's policy address in October last year, HAD has taken up the new task of monitoring and assessing services for new arrivals from China.

Deputy Director, Miss Sandra Lee, explained: "Our aim is to assist the new arrivals to integrate into the local community smoothly and as quickly as possible, and to ensure that they are aware of the support services which are available to them.

"To this end, the Director of Home Affairs personally chairs a Steering Committee which comprises representatives of government departments which provide dedicated services to new arrivals. Representatives from voluntary agencies and other departments which provide general services are also invited to participate as necessary. There are also similar set-up in each of the 18 Districts to complement the work of the steering committee."

To establish a means to communicate with the new arrivals and to identify the residing districts in which they live, HAD has arranged with the Immigration Department to invite new arrivals to fill in a simple survey form when they apply for their identity cards seven days after landing in Hong Kong. They are invited to supply information on their age, as well as those of their children; the dialects they speak; and their addresses and telephone numbers.

In conclusion, Mrs Lau stressed that the year 1995 had been an exciting foundation year for the department, and she and her colleagues looked forward to the community's support in implementing the new initiatives in 1996.

She gave credit to staff of the 18 district offices, Office of the Licensing Authority and the RPIS team for their hard work in the past year.

She thanked all community organisations and members of the public in particular for their understanding and support for HAD in forging ahead with its new initiatives.

"I am fully confident that my colleagues will continue to discharge all their duties with dedication and enthusiasm," Mrs Lau stressed.

End

Newspaper advertisements on water cut

Advertisements listing major water supply suspensions planned in the following week are being placed every Friday in six Chinese and one English newspapers.

This is part of the Water Supplies Department's continuing efforts to enhance its service to customers by keeping them informed well beforehand of major suspensions of water supply.

The seven papers are Hong Kong Economic Times, Ming Pao, Oriental Daily News, Sing Pao, Sing Tao Evening News, South China Morning Post and Ta Kung Pao.

The advertisements would contain only those suspensions of which the affected areas were large and distribution of notices to every individual customers was not practicable, a spokesman for the department said today (Saturday).

"It will supplement the current practice of announcing major planned supply suspensions through the radio and press release.

"At the same time, distribution of individual notices to major housing estates and buildings will also be carried out as far as practicable," he said.

The spokesman said for planned supply suspensions of a smaller scale, consumers would continue to be informed directly by notices distributed to their premises or buildings or through their management offices.

"Urgent supply suspensions will be announced through the radio as soon as possible," he added.

End

The weather of January

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January was warmer than normal. The mean temperature of 17.8 degrees was the fifth highest for January. The mean minimum and mean maximum temperatures also ranked the fourth and eighth highest for the month.

While rain was recorded on 14 days, the total rainfall amounted to only 1.3 millimetres, 22.1 millimetres below normal. The sunshine duration of 134.4 hours was also 18 hours below the normal figure.

The cool, fine and dry weather at the end of 1995 continued in the first four days in the new year. Easterly winds freshened on the night of January 3 and cloud cover gradually increased the next day. Winds moderated on January 5 and a maritime airstream brought some light rain the next day.

A cold front accompanied by strong northerly winds passed the South China coast on the morning of January 8. For the next five days, temperatures stayed below 20 degrees.

Meanwhile, winds turned easterly on January 9 and freshened on the early morning of January 11 with light rain patches.

Fine weather returned two days later but was followed by cloudy conditions early on January 15. Cloudy weather with patches of light rain prevailed the next 10 days.

However, sunny periods on January 18 brought the temperature up to 24.1 degrees, the highest for the month, before the arrival of a weak replenishment of fresh cool northerly winds that evening.

As the winds subsided on January 22, it became hazy and visibility inside the harbour fell to 2,000 metres in the afternoon. A strong easterly airstream cleared the haze early on January 24.

Another northerly surge of the winter monsoon brought cooler air on January 25. Temperatures stayed well below 20 degrees for the next five days.

The lowest temperature for the month, 12.1 degrees, was recorded at the Royal Observatory on the morning of January 27. In the northern part of the New Territories, temperatures fell below 10 degrees.

Milder conditions returned as clouds over Hong Kong cleared on the last day of the month.

There was no tropical cyclone over the western North Pacific and the South China Sea in January.

Details of the issuance/hoisting and cancellation/lowering of various warnings/signals in the month are summarised in Table 1.1.

Monthly meteorological figures and departures from normal of January are tabulated in Table 1.2.

Table 1.1 Warnings and signals in January 1996

Warnings/Signals	Effective date and time
Strong Monsoon Signal	8 Jan 1135 - 9 Jan 0745

Fire Danger Warnings	
Red	24 Dec 0605 - 2 Jan 0600
Yellow	2 Jan 0600 - 6 Jan 1320
Yellow	9 Jan 0600 - 11 Jan 0710
Yellow	14 Jan 0600 - 15 Jan 0600
Yellow	19 Jan 0600 - 19 Jan 1800
Yellow	20 Jan 0640 - 21 Jan 1800
Yellow	26 Jan 0600 - 30 Jan 0600
Yellow	31 Jan 0600 - 1 Feb 0600

Gas Heater Alerts	29 Dec 1630 - 1 Jan 0830
	19 Jan 1630 - 20 Jan 0630
	26 Jan 1630 - 28 Jan 0830

Table 1.2 Figures and Departures from Normal - January 1996

Total Bright Sunshine	134.4 hours; 18 hours below normal
Mean Daily Global Solar Radiation	10.47 MJ/SQM; 1.16 MJ/SQM below normal
Total Rainfall	1.3 mm; 22.1 mm below normal
Mean Cloud Amount	63%; 5% above normal
Mean Relative Humidity	71%; normal
Mean Daily Maximum Temperature	19.9 Degree Celcius; 1.3 Degree Celcius above normal
Mean Air Temperature	17.8 Degree Celcius; 2.0 Degree Celcius above normal
Mean Daily Minimum Temperature	15.8 Degree Celcius; 2.2 Degree Celcius above normal
Mean Dew Point	12.3 Degree Celcius; 2.1 Degree Celcius above normal
Total Evaporation	77.3 mm; 20.2 mm below normal

Remarks: All measurements were made at the Royal Observatory except sunshine, solar radiation and evaporation which were recorded at King's Park.

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	2,375	09:30	+190
Closing balance in the account	1,672	10:00	+190
Change attributable to:		11:00	+190
Money market activity	+190	11:30	+190
LAF today	-893		

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.6 *+0.0* 10.2.96

End

Inter-departmental team to submit hill fire report

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An inter-departmental investigation team, jointly set up by Fire Services, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Education departments, is expected to complete a report on the Pat Sin Range hill fire in four weeks.

The team, headed by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (New Territories), Mr Kwok Jing-keung, will look into the cause of the fire and the circumstances leading to the high number of casualties.

It will also make recommendations to prevent recurrence of similar incident.

The team had held a meeting with representatives from the Police, Civil Aid Services and Government Flying Services at the New Territories Fire Command Headquarters in Sha Tin this (Sunday) morning.

The report will be submitted to the heads of Fire Services, Agriculture and Fisheries and Education departments.

End

Counselling for hill fire students and teachers offered

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Five officers including education psychologists and student counsellors from the Education Department this (Sunday) morning visited Fung Yiu King Memorial Secondary School in Ma On Shan to give counselling service to some of the students, teachers and staff who might be emotionally affected by yesterday's hill fire in Pat Sin Leng.

A team of education psychologists would visit the school again tomorrow morning to offer similar service, a spokesman for the department said.

Small group counselling would be organised if necessary, the spokesman added.

Meanwhile, the Director of Education, Mrs Helen C P Lai Yu, and Senior Education Officer (Sha Tin), Mr Chan Hin-mou, visited the injured students at the Prince of Wales Hospital again this afternoon to extend her concern to the students and their families.

End

Water Supplies Department joins Internet

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The Water Supplies Department will join the Internet from tomorrow (Monday) as part of its continuing efforts to improve its service to customers.

From tomorrow, the department will maintain a home page in the World Wide Web (WWW) which is accessible to all Internet users.

Through this home page, users can obtain information on water supplies in Hong Kong, the department's principal functions and services, calculation of water charges, water consumption statistics, the department's performance pledge, various types of customer services, channels of enquiries and complaints, the department's Customer Liaison Group and the Newsletter "Waterlink".

In addition, a list of the department's publications, details of the forthcoming Water Hong Kong '96 Conference and Exhibition as well as other technical information relating to water supplies will also be accessible.

Users may also use the Suggestion Box page to leave messages or give their comments. They can also use the system to lodge enquiries or complaints, obtain advice on water supply application procedures and to obtain printed copies of the application forms.

Internet users who have installed suitable Chinese software (Chinese Windows) may also access the information in Chinese.

The home page of the Water Supplies Department can be accessed anytime at:
<http://www.info.gov.hk/wsd/>

End

Trade Department to launch interactive voice enquiry hotline

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The Trade Department will launch a new customer service next week to provide a modern and convenient channel for the public to obtain important trade information during and outside office hours.

Starting from Wednesday (February 14), members of the public can utilise the new service - an Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) - in obtaining such trade information as fees and charges, certification, licensing and application requirements and procedures and the validity period of different kinds of certificates and licences, in either English, Cantonese or Putonghua by just calling a 24-hour hotline 2392 2922.

The number is easy to remember if they memorise it as 23-922-922. Through the IVRS hotline, they can also obtain application forms and information leaflets on various services offered by the department and request for these to be sent to their fax machines.

Announcing this today (Sunday), a spokesman for the Trade Department said the new service was an important part of a phased programme implemented by the department to enhance the level of its services to meet increasing customer demands.

"Following the installation of a multi-media touch screen enquiry system in 1994, the department's telephone system was upgraded in May last year to enable customers to get through the lines more easily," the spokesman said.

"As there are at present more than 40 telephone enquiry numbers in the department dealing with different trade subjects, members of the public may need to undergo a process of dialling and re-dialling before they get to the right telephone number.

"To solve this problem, we are introducing the new IVRS service from where the public could obtain different trade information by just making one telephone call at any time of the day, seven days a week."

Apart from providing a centralised enquiry service, the spokesman said, the IVRS would help enhance staff productivity as the system could effectively handle most of the simple and general enquiries, thus enabling department staff to concentrate on other aspects of trade-related duties, to handle the more complicated enquiries and take necessary follow-up actions.

The spokesman said IVRS would be operating on two major functions: audiotext and fax transmission.

"It will provide a front-line service to the public, automatically receiving all incoming telephone calls, prompting the callers by a digitised human voice to choose from a selection of pre-recorded messages or forms by pressing the specified numbers on a touch-tone telephone," the spokesman said.

"The callers can either listen to standard voice messages or request for a form or information leaflet to be sent to their fax machines. The system also allows callers to talk to the operator who will transfer their calls to the appropriate unit for further consultation."

The following are the main categories of trade information which can be obtained from the IVRS:

- * Business hours;
- * Fees and charges;
- * Location of Trade Department and its counters;
- * Procession time required and validity period of various applications;
- * Registration procedures;
- * Application and subscription procedures;
- * Other enquiries, and
- * Fax of forms and information leaflets.

The spokesman urged the public to make full use of the new enquiry hotline which is a time-saving service designed for their convenience.

Apart from the new IVRS service, in-person enquiries would continue to be handled during office hours by the department's General Enquiry Counter at the ground floor lobby of the Trade Department Tower, 700 Nathan Road, Kowloon and by enquiry counters in different branches of the department, he added.

End

Government car parks monthly tickets sale re-scheduled

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The date for selling the monthly tickets of five government car parks for March will be re-scheduled from February 20 to February 23, the Transport Department announces today(Sunday).

"The reason to re-schedule the ticket selling date is to avoid affecting the car park users to enjoy the Lunar New Year holidays," a spokesman for the department said.

"Time for selling the monthly tickets on February 23 will remain unchanged at 7.30 am," he added.

The five government car parks are: Garden Road and Rumsey Street in Central, Electric Road in Tin Hau, Market Street in Yau Ma Tei and Sai Lau Kok Road in Tsuen Wan .

"However, the selling date of monthly tickets for April will be resumed to normal on March 20," the spokesman said.

End

Employers warned against sacking injured employees

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Employers are reminded today (Sunday) not to dismiss any employee who is entitled to compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (ECO) under certain conditions.

These conditions, whichever occurs first, are: the employer has not entered into an agreement with the injured employee under the ordinance to settle the claim directly; or the Labour Department has not certified the amount of compensation payable or the Assessment Board has certified the percentage of the loss of earning capacity suffered by the injured employee.

Recently, the owner of Wong Chiu Kee Timber in Tai Po was fined \$10,000 at Sha Tin Magistracy for dismissing an employee wounded at work before an Ordinary Assessment Board had issued a Certificate of Assessment (Form 7).

"Under the ECO, an injured employee who is likely to suffer from permanent incapacity would be assessed by an Ordinary Assessment Board on his loss of earning capacity permanently caused by the injury.

"A Certificate of Assessment will be issued by the board after the assessment," Labour Officer (Prosecutions), Mrs Tonia Leung, explained.

She said the objective of the relevant provisions of ECO was to ensure that an injured employee would not be without employment until he was certified fit to resume work or when compensation for permanent incapacity became payable.

"The department takes a serious view on this matter and will not hesitate to prosecute any employer who commits such offence which carries a maximum penalty of \$25,000," Mrs Leung said.

End

New geological map published

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The Geotechnical Engineering Office (GEO) of the Civil Engineering Department has published a new 1:20,000 geological map known as 'Sheet 14 (Cheung Chau)'.

"The map is the latest in the series of 15 maps being produced by the Hong Kong Geological Survey of the GEO following the systematic geological mapping of the territory," the head of GEO, Dr Andrew Malone, said today (Sunday).

"It covers the extensive offshore area of the West Lamma Channel and the surrounding land areas including the Chi Ma Wan peninsula of Lantau Island, Cheung Chau, Shek Kwu Chau and parts of Hei Ling Chau and Lamma Island.

"Geologically, most of the map portrays the offshore sediments of the West Lamma Channel.

"Thick marine mud deposits form the sea floor and a very extensive area of natural organic gas exists in the north-central part of the channel.

"To the south of Cheung Chau is the sea-bed mound of a disposal site for uncontaminated mud.

"The land areas are mainly composed of rhyolite dykes intruded medium-grained granite rocks. Coarse-grained volcanic rocks occur on the northern tip of Lamma Island and at the landward end of the Chi Ma Wan peninsula," he said.

Dr Malone pointed out that the new map would be of interest and value to earth and marine scientists, engineers, environmentalists, developers, planners, teachers and students.

"A memoir describing the geology of the area, together with that depicted in the adjacent Lantau district sheets 9,10 and 13 will soon be published," he said.

All published maps and memoirs of the Hong Kong Geological Survey are available from the Government Publications Centre and map sales outlets of the Lands Department.

Further information on the geology of specific areas in Hong Kong can be obtained from larger-scale unpublished maps and archival records of the Hong Kong Geological Survey.

Arrangements to inspect these maps and records can be made by contacting the head of the Geological Survey on 2762 5380.

End