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Contents **Page No.**

Prime Minister to pay two-day visit to Hong Kong 1

HK government delegation to visit China 2

Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 2

Factory Inspectors set new prosecution record 3

Views sought on prevocational and technical education 5

Resource centre to boost child care service 6

Disposal of recalled Vitasoy products 7

External trade figures for January 8

Office hours back to normal for BN(O) passports collection 11

37 new building plans approved in December 12

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations .....

Prime Minister to pay two-day visit to Hong Kong

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The British Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major, will arrive in Hong Kong in the late evening of Saturday (March 2) for an official two-day visit after attending the inaugural Asia-Europe Summit in Bangkok.

He will start the first working day of his visit - Sunday - with a briefing and discussions with the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten.

After lunch, Mr Major, accompanied by the Governor, will begin a packed programme with a visit to the Lantau Fixed Crossing to see the progress of work on the Tsing Ma Bridge which will be the world's longest suspension bridge carrying both road and rail traffic.

Afterwards, he will travel by helicopter to Chek Lap Kok to visit the site of the new airport. This will be his first opportunity to see the development of this project since he signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the airport with Premier Li Peng in Peking in September 1991.

Later in the evening, Mr Major will attend a dinner at Government House hosted by the Governor and Mrs Patten in his honour for more than 150 political, business and community leaders.

On Monday (March 4) morning, the Prime Minister will visit the new Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre extension where he will unveil a foundation stone to commemorate his visit to Hong Kong.

He will then meet members of the Executive and Legislative Councils at Government House.

Mr Major will deliver a keynote speech at a luncheon jointly hosted by the British Chamber of Commerce and the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce at the Grand Hyatt Hong Kong Hotel in Wan Chai.

In the afternoon, he will pay a visit to Sha Tin District where he will stop at the Hong Kong Sports Institute, the Baptist Lui Ming Choi Primary School and the Sha Tin New Town Plaza to meet young athletes and sportsmen, students, teachers and local residents.

Before leaving Hong Kong for Seoul, Korea, later that evening, the Prime Minister will hold a press conference at the Central Government Offices New Annexe, Lower Albert Road.

End

HK government delegation to visit China

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The Secretary for Works, Mr Kwong Hon-sang, will be visiting Beijing and Dalian from March 3 to 12 this year, a Government spokesman announced today (Thursday).

He will be accompanied by seven other Hong Kong Government officials.

"This is one in a series of China visits started in 1988 for the purpose of general familiarisation," the spokesman said.

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Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill

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The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 1996, which aims at improving the administration of the Fund, will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday).

The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund Ordinance provides for the Fund to be administered by a committee of six members, the composition of which includes Lawrence Kadoorie (the late Lord Kadoorie) and Horace Kadoorie (the late Sir Horace Kadoorie).

A Government spokesman said: "As there are only four members remained in the loan fund committee now, the committee is unable to function as effectively as before.

"The Bill therefore proposes that the membership of the committee be increased to seven through the addition of one member nominated by Sir Elly Kadoorie & Sons Limited and two other new members."

The spokesman said: "The membership changes will ensure that the loan fund committee retains a link with the Kadoorie family and there are more opportunities for different representatives of the agricultural sector to experience the workings of the committee.

"The Bill also updates the definition of "agriculture" in the Ordinance, which already includes fish culture, to include all forms of aquaculture, to make it clear that both pond fish farmers and mariculturists may apply for loans from the Fund," he added.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on March 13.

The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund was established in 1955 with donations from Lawrence Kadoorie, Horace Kadoorie and the Government for the purpose of encouraging and improving agriculture in Hong Kong by the issue of loans to farmers or groups of farmers.

Since its inception, nearly 80,000 loans totalling some $170 million have been made from the Fund.

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Factory Inspectors set new prosecution record

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The Factory Inspectorate Division (FID) of the Labour Department had achieved a new record last year in the number of prosecutions against those who breached industrial safety laws, the Deputy Commissioner for Labour (Special Duties), Mr Lee Kai-fat, said this (Thursday) afternoon.

Mr Lee said a record 3,252 summonses involving breaches of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (FIUO) and its subsidiary regulations had secure a conviction last year, representing a significant increase of 29 per cent over 1994.

Out of these cases, 592 were against employers who failed to effectively guard the dangerous parts of machinery; 369 related to failing to provide workers in construction sites with safety helmets; and 327 were against contractors for failing to provide guard rails or coverings to dangerous places to prevent the fall of persons.

Fines totalling $38.8 million were imposed by the courts last year as a result of the successful prosecutions.

"It was the highest record of total fines ever imposed on industrial safety offences, representing a 73 per cent increase over the previous year.

"It was also the first time that the average fine for each convicted summons had exceeded the $11,900 mark. These are encouraging signs," Mr Lee said.

He attributed the success to the concerted efforts of the factory inspectors, particularly those who had conducted nearly 22,000 inspections to construction sites and another 61,000 to other industrial undertakings in 1995.

Turning to the implementation of recommendations in the Consultation Paper on the Review of Industrial Safety in Hong Kong, Mr Lee said FID of the department was being restructured to reflect the changes.

"Sixty-six new posts, including 44 Factory Inspector posts, three senior engineer and one senior chemist posts are expected to be created in April this year to help implement the recommendations.

"Following a successful year of prosecutions, our prime target this year will focus on the promotion of safety management at the enterprise level so that safety and health issues could be tackled more effectively," he said.

He said an amendment to FIUO was expected to be made in May to empower the Commissioner for Labour to issue suspension notices and improvement notices to stop hazardous processes, the operation of dangerous machines or the use of working methods until proprietors had taken specific safety measures to eliminate the risks.

The Commissioner also intends to make a new set of regulation to require proprietors of large or hazardous industrial undertakings to implement safety management systems in the workplace.

Later in the year, the proposed regulation will prescribe the key process elements of a safety management system and provide for its effectiveness to be measured by safety audits or safety reviews depending on the size of an undertaking or the nature of a process.

Furthermore, a number of existing industrial safety laws are being amended to enhance their control on work safety and to follow up on the recommendation of enhanced law enforcement.

Another major move by FID is to extend the protection of work safety and health to other occupations which are at present outside the ambit of existing safety legislation.

"To achieve this target, a new enabling ordinance and two subsidiary regulations, namely - one on basic safety and health provisions in the workplace and another one on manual handling operation, will be introduced shortly," Mr Lee said.

In its promotion of occupational safety in the territory, FID has launched a number of activities last year which included seminars and more than 510 safety training courses for some 16,500 participants.

With the support of the Information Services Department, the 1995-96 industrial safety campaign is now in full swing.

Three films promoting the need to wear safety belts, hearing protection and work safety in confined spaces, will be broadcast in Hong Kong's three major television stations from March 1.

A fourth promotion film on safety helmet is being produced.

End

Views sought on prevocational and technical education

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Educators and members of the public are being invited to submit views on Hong Kong's prevocational and secondary technical education system, which is being reviewed by the Government.

The Education Department has set up a working group to conduct a comprehensive review of prevocational and secondary technical education in Hong Kong, covering such topics as curriculum, interface with tertiary institutes, teaching facilities and teacher training.

Members of the public are invited to send their views to the Secretary, Working Group to Review Prevocational and Secondary Technical Education at Room 1404, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong, before April 1, 1996.

Interested parties are also welcome to participate in any one of the two public forums organised by the Working Group to be held this Saturday (March 2) and the following Saturday (March 9) at Harbour View Room, 3rd floor, the Excelsior Hotel, 281 Gloucester Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, from 9.30 am to noon.

Enquiries may be made on 2892 6315.

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Resource centre to boost child care service

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A new resource centre will be opened tomorrow (Friday) to boost the standard of child care service in the territory.

The Child Care Service Resource Centre (CCSRC), operated by the Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of the Social Welfare Department, aims to provide supportive service primarily to child care service professionals for the development of child care services in Hong Kong.

"The resource centre will be opened to front-line registered child care staff, child care service personnel, child care training personnel as well as approved child care training course students," a spokesman for the department said today (Thursday).

Situated on the 23rd floor of Southorn Centre, 130 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, the CCSRC will be opened from 9 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm on weekdays and from 9 am to 12 noon on Saturdays. It will be closed on Sundays and public holidays.

"Services provided include on-the-spot study and loan of reference materials; preview and loan of audio-visual materials; exhibition of self-made quality teaching aids and activity projects; and production of Cantonese-dubbed version of foreign video programmes.

"The resource centre has initially more than 1,000 items of reference materials including books, periodicals, reports, newsletters, pamphlets/leaflets and newspaper clippings," the spokesman said, adding that new items will be added from time to time.

In order to provide better service to users, the CCSRC will adopt an extended service hours scheme on every first Saturday of the month.

The extended service hours, opened from 1 pm to 5 pm, will be implemented on a trial basis for six months.

Enquirers may contact the CCSRC on telephone 2835 2712.

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Disposal of recalled Vitasoy products

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In response to media enquiries, a Principal Environmental Protection Officer of the Environmental Protection Department, Dr Ellen Chan, today (Thursday) confirmed that the disposal trials through landfilling, incineration and sewage treatment of recalled Vitasoy products had been completed.

According to Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd, about 8 200 tonnes (liquid plus cartons) of their products that were recalled from the market in January this year will need to be disposed of.

So far, a total of 1 400 tonnes of these products have been disposed of at the North East New Territories (NENT) Landfill, the South East New Territories (SENT) Landfill, the Kwai Chung Incineration Plant and Sai Kung Sewage Treatment Works on a trial basis.

Dr Chan said that the disposal trials at the two landfills had been found to be satisfactory.

"The disposal has caused no effect on groundwater or surface water as the landfills are completely lined and the leachate collected is being pumped to on-site treatment facilities for treatment before discharging to the sewerage system," she noted.

"As such, the NENT and SENT landfills can increase their daily intake from 10 tonnes to at least 20 and 50 tonnes respectively with effect from March 1," Dr Chan added.

Dr Chan also noted that the disposal of recalled Vitasoy products by means of incineration and secondary sewage treatment had also been found to be acceptable with no discernible effect on either the operation or the environmental performance of the plants.

The Kwai Chung Incineration Plant would continue a daily intake of about 10 tonnes before the plant closes down for routine maintenance in mid March 1996 while the Sai Kung Sewage Treatment Works can accept at least 30 tonnes of liquid products a day, she said.

"According to this disposal plan, all the recalled Vitasoy products are expected to be disposed of by the end of April or early May," she added.

As for the costs for disposal, Dr Chan said Vitasoy had been informed that details of the charges to be levied were now being worked out by the Government.

End

External trade figures for January

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Both re-exports and imports showed marked increases in January 1996 over a year earlier and domestic exports also registered a moderate increase, according to the external trade figures for January released by the Census and Statistics Department today (Thursday).

The value of total exports (comprising re-exports and domestic exports) increased by $18.9 billion or 19% over a year earlier to $120.2 billion in January 1996. Within total exports, the value of re-exports, at $101.2 billion in January this year, was $18 billion or 22% higher.

The value of domestic exports, at $19 billion, increased by $815 million or 4.5%. Meanwhile, the value of imports increased by $25.3 billion or 24% to $130.3 billion.

As the value of total exports in January 1996 was smaller than that of total imports, a visible trade deficit of $10.1 billion, equivalent to 7.7% of the value of imports, was recorded. This compared with a deficit of $3.6 billion, equivalent to 3.5% of the value of imports, in January 1995.

A government spokesman said the strong export performance in January, involving an accelerated growth in both domestic exports and re-exports, was encouraging.

Meanwhile, the value of retained imports also showed a marked increase, by 29% over a year earlier, reflecting continued strong import demand for production and capacity expansion purposes.

The table annexed presents the external trade figures in January 1996.

A more detailed analysis of Hong Kong's external trade for January 1996, by commodity and country, will be released in mid-March 1996.

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EXTERNAL TRADE FIGURES FOR JANUARY 1996

MERCHANDISE:	Domestic Exports	:	$18,993 million
	Re-exports	:	$101,192 million
	Total Exports	:	$120,185 million
	Imports	:	$130,279 million
	Trade balance	:	-$10,093 million

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

Latest 3 months	Nov 95 to Jan 96 HK$ Mn.	Nov 94 to Jan 95 HK$ Mn.	Change HK$ Mn.	Change %
Domestic Exports	57,996	58,751	-755	-1.3
(% of Total Exports)	(16.7%)	(18.9%)		
Re-exports	290,150	251,941	+38,209	+15.2
Total Exports	348,146	310,692	+37,454	+12.1
Imports	382,872	333,613	+49,259	+14.8
Trade balance	-34,726	-22,921	-11,805	

Same month last year	January 1996 HK$ Mn.	January 1995 HK$ Mn.	Change HK$ Mn.	Change %
Domestic Exports	18,993	18,178	+815	+4.5
(% of Total Exports)	(15.8%)	(17.9%)		
Re-exports	101,192	83,143	+18,049	+21.7
Total Exports	120,185	101,321	+18,864	+18.6
Imports	130,279	104,944	+25,335	+24.1
Trade balance	-10,093	-3,623	-6,470	

Last month	January 1996 HK$ Mn.	December 1995 HK$ Mn.	Change HK$ Mn.	Change %
Domestic Exports	18,993	20,157	-1,164	-5.8
(% of Total Exports)	(15.8%)	(17.5%)		
Re-exports	101,192	95,153	+6,038	+6.3
Total Exports	120,185	115,311	+4,874	+4.2
Imports	130,279	127,689	+2,589	+2.0
Trade balance	-10,093	-12,378	+2,285	

Last 12 months	Feb 95 to Jan 96 HK$ Mn.	Feb 94 to Jan 95 HK$ Mn.	Change HK$ Mn.	Change %
Domestic Exports	232,473	224,930	+7,543	+3.4
(% of Total Exports)	(17.1%)	(18.9%)		
Re-exports	1,130,519	964,293	+166,226	+17.2
Total Exports	1,362,991	1,189,223	+173,769	+14.6
Imports	1,516,456	1,275,275	+241,181	+18.9
Trade balance	-153,464	-86,052	-67,412	

29 February 1996
CENSUS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT

End

Office hours back to normal for BN(O) passports collection

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The Immigration Department will cease to operate extended working hours on Saturdays for collection of BN(O) passports at the Travel Documents (Passport) Section at its Headquarters and nine branch Offices, a spokesman of the department announced today (Friday).

With effect from March 1, the following offices will not extend services on Saturdays up to 3 pm. Their normal office hours are:

* Travel Documents (Passport) Section

Mondays - Fridays	8.45 am to 4.30 pm
Saturdays	9 am to 11.30 am

* Hong Kong Island Re-entry Permit and Passport Issuing Office

Mondays - Fridays	9 am to 4.30 pm
Saturdays	9 am to 12.30 pm

Other Immigration Offices are:

(i) Kowloon Office
(ii) West Kowloon Office
(iii) Sha Tin Office
(iv) Tai Po Office
(v) Fanling Office
(vi) Tsuen Wan Office
(vii) Tuen Mun Office
(viii) Yuen Long Office

Mondays - Fridays	9 am to 12.45 pm and 2 pm to 4.30 pm
Saturdays	9 am to 12.30 pm

Applicants who have been notified to collect their BN(O) passports are reminded that they should pick them up at the specified office within two months from the date of notification.

If they do not do so within this period, they may be required to collect their passports at another office.

For enquiry, members of the public may phone 2824 6111 or fax 2877 7711.

End

37 new building plans approved in December

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The Buildings Department had approved 37 building plans in December last year.

Of the plans, 13 are for Hong Kong Island, nine for Kowloon and 15 for the New Territories.

The approved plans include 14 for apartment and apartment/commercial developments, nine for commercial developments, seven for factory and industrial developments, and seven for community services developments.

In the same month, consent was given for work to start on 28 building projects, which involve 90,870 square metres of usable domestic floor area and 71,349 square metres of usable non-domestic floor area.

During the same period, the department also issued 33 occupation permits - seven for Hong Kong Island, 14 for Kowloon and 12 for the New Territories.

Of the buildings certified for occupation in the month, the usable floor areas for domestic and non-domestic uses are 105,131 square metres and 132,219 square metres respectively.

The declared cost of new buildings completed in the month totalled about $2,628 million.

In addition, 10 demolition consents involving 18 buildings and structures were issued.

The Buildings Department's Control and Enforcement Division had received 553 complaints of unauthorised building works, and had issued 325 removal orders on unauthorised works.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

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	$ million	Time (hours)	Cumulative change ($million)
Opening balance in the account	2,776	0930	+24
Closing balance in the account	2,050	1000	+24
Change attributable to :		1100	+24
Money market activity	+49	1200	+24
LAF today	-775	1500	+49
		1600	+49

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.4 *+0.4* 29.2.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.72	2 years	2802	5.16	99.52	5.49
1 month	4.83	3 years	3901	5.57	99.65	5.78
3 months	5.00	5 years	5012	6.38	100.54	6.34
6 months	5.09	7 years	7302	6.02	96.62	6.74
12 months	5.16	5 years	M502	7.30	103.12	6.62

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - $15,352 million

Closed February 29, 1996

End