



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1988

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SEM CALLS FOR UNITED APPROACH ON EDUCATION
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THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER, THE HON RON BRIDGE, SAID TODAY (WEDNESDAY) HE HOPED THAT WHEN FINAL DECISIONS HAD BEEN MADE ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSION'S REPORT NO. 3, THOSE CONCERNED WOULD PUT ASIDE THEIR OWN SECTORAL INTERESTS AND WORK TOWARDS A SOLUTION WHICH WOULD BENEFIT ALL STUDENTS IN HONG KONG.

IN REPLY TO POINTS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IN THE MOTION DEBATE ON THE REPORT, MR BRIDGE STRESSED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT YET TAKEN A VIEW ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

"ALL COMMENTS, WHETHER SUPPORTIVE OR CRITICAL, WILL BE FULLY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT," HE TOLD THE COUNCIL.

ON THE STRUCTURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION, MR BRIDGE SAID HE BELIEVED STRONGLY IN ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

THIS MEANT THE RIGHT TO OFFER WHATEVER CURRICULA AN INSTITUTION MIGHT CONSIDER APPROPRIATE WITHOUT INTERFERENCE BY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE CONTENT OF COURSES OR THE METHOD OF TEACHING.

HOWEVER, MR BRIDGE SAID THIS FREEDOM DID HAVE TWO IMPORTANT LIMITATIONS.

"THE FIRST IS THAT THE FREEDOM OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD NOT BE EXERCISED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SECONDARY SECTOR," HE SAID.

"COURSES AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS MAY VARY IN LENGTH: BUT THEY SHOULD ALL BEGIN AT THE END OF THE STANDARD SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION PERIOD.

"SECOND, FREEDOM DOES NOT INCLUDE THE RIGHT TO DISPOSE OF PUBLIC FUNDS WITHOUT ANY FORM OF SUPERVISION."

MR BRIDGE NOTED THAT THREE OF THE 12 RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMISSION WERE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT AND HAD ATTRACTED THE MOST ATTENTION DURING THE PERIOD OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND IN THE DEBATE.

THE FIRST OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WAS THAT THERE SHOULD BE A UNIFIED POINT OF ENTRY TO ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AFTER SECONDARY 7.

"ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT YET FINISHED THE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE REPORT, IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT THIS RECOMMENDATION HAS ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT," MR BRIDGE SAID.

HE NOTED THAT IF IMPLEMENTED, IT WOULD BRING HONG KONG INTO LINE WITH MOST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES WHERE PUBLICLY FUNDED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS HAD TO ACCEPT THEIR STUDENTS FROM THE FINAL YEAR OF THE STANDARD LENGTH OF SECONDARY EDUCATION.

/"IN HONG KONG,

"IN HONG KONG, THE LACK OF A UNIFIED ENTRY POINT HAS CAUSED DISRUPTION TO THE SIXTH FORM CURRICULUM AND HAS INCREASED THE PRESSURE ON STUDENTS WHO ARE COMPETING TO OBTAIN TERTIARY PLACES," HE SAID.

HE AGREED WITH THE VIEW THAT IT WAS VITAL FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO ACT QUICKLY TO END THIS SITUATION.

THE SECOND KEY RECOMMENDATION RELATED TO THE QUESTION OF ALL THREE-YEAR OR ALL FOUR-YEAR FIRST DEGREE COURSES.

WHILE BELIEVING THAT THE LENGTH OF COURSES SHOULD NOT BE ARBITRARILY FIXED BY THE ADMINISTRATION, THE COMMISSION BELIEVED THAT THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE THE FREEDOM TO APPROACH THE UNIVERSITY AND POLYTECHNIC GRANTS COMMITTEE WITH PROPOSALS FOR COURSES OF WHATEVER LENGTH THEY CONSIDERED, ON EDUCATIONAL GROUNDS, TO BE APPROPRIATE.

MR BRIDGE PUT EMPHASIS ON THE COMMISSION'S EXPRESSION OF "ON EDUCATIONAL GROUNDS", WHICH COVERED BOTH ACADEMIC AND GENERAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.

"I MUST EMPHASISE THAT THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS DO NOT POSE ANY THREAT TO ANY PARTICULAR FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE, UNLESS IT CAN BE SHOWN THAT FOUR YEARS IS NOT EDUCATIONALLY NECESSARY," HE SAID.

THE THIRD RECOMMENDATION WAS THAT THE LENGTH OF FIRST DEGREE COURSES AT ALL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD IN PRINCIPLE BE THE SAME FOR ANY GIVEN SUBJECT.

MR BRIDGE POINTED OUT THAT THE COMMISSION INTENDED THAT THE RECOMMENDATION SHOULD BE INTERPRETED CAREFULLY, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE COURSE CONTENT OF PROGRAMMES OFFERED AT DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS, AS WELL AS THE EXISTENCE OF "SANDWICH" COURSES AT SOME INSTITUTIONS.

ON A CRITICISM THAT THE REAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE UNIVERSITIES IN MAINTAINING STANDARDS HAD NOT BEEN ADDRESSED, MR BRIDGE SAID THE COMMISSION DID PROPOSE SENSIBLE MEASURES TO HELP THE UNIVERSITIES MAINTAIN THEIR HIGH STANDARDS.

"THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR REMEDIAL TEACHING IN ENGLISH SHOULD HELP TO IMPROVE THE LOW STANDARD OF ENGLISH," HE SAID.

"IN THE LONGER TERM, THE MEASURES NOW IN HAND TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SIXTH FORM EDUCATION WILL HELP TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ENTER TERTIARY EDUCATION BETTER PREPARED THAN BEFORE.

"THE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMISSION TO OVERSEE THESE MEASURES HAS BEEN SET UP AND IS OPERATING WELL, WITH BOTH SCHOOLS AND TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS TAKING PART."

/MR BRIDGE

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MR BRIDGE NOTED THAT AS POINTED OUT BY A MEMBER, THE UNIVERSITIES' PRESENT PROBLEMS WERE PARTLY OF THEIR OWN MAKING.

"THEIR ADMISSION POLICIES HAVE ALWAYS FAVOURED THOSE STUDENTS WHO DID WELL IN A NARROW RANGE OF SUBJECTS. THERE HAS THUS BEEN NO INCENTIVE FOR STUDENTS TO STUDY MORE BROADLY OR TO IMPROVE THEIR LANGUAGE SKILLS.

"IF THE UNIVERSITIES WERE TO REQUIRE A WIDER RANGE OF SUBJECT AND HIGHER LANGUAGE SKILLS, I AM SURE THAT OUR STUDENTS WOULD RESPOND," HE SAID.

TURNING TO THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS, MR BRIDGE SAID THAT A STRONG PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR OPERATING ALONGSIDE THE PUBLIC SECTOR COULD PROVIDE CHOICE, VARIETY AND SPECIALISATION, AND COULD CATER TO CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS.

IT WAS HOPED THAT A DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME (DSS) PROPOSED BY THE COMMISSION WOULD MAKE THESE ADVANTAGES AVAILABLE, HE SAID.

"TO ENTER THE DSS, SCHOOLS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO REACH THE STANDARDS OF AIDED SCHOOLS.

"PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN THE BOUGHT PLACE SCHEME WOULD BE HELPED TO MEET THESE STANDARDS THROUGH A SYSTEM OF FIXED CONTRACTS OVER THE NEXT DECADE.

"AIDED AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS WOULD ALSO BE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY TO JOIN THE SCHEME.

"A NEW PRIVATE SCHOOLS REVIEW COMMITTEE WOULD ADVISE ON ADMISSION TO THE DSS AND ON MAINTAINING STANDARDS," HE ADDED.

STATING THAT THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS IN THE NEW SCHEME WERE NOT UNDER-ESTIMATED, MR BRIDGE SAID THAT THEY WERE BEING GIVEN URGENT CONSIDERATION BY A WORKING GROUP WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION.

MR BRIDGE GAVE AN ASSURANCE THAT NO FORMAL COMMITTEE WOULD BE ESTABLISHED TO IMPLEMENT THE DSS UNLESS AND UNTIL IT WAS APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

ON A CONCERN THAT THE MOST POPULAR AIDED SCHOOLS WOULD CHOOSE TO JOIN THE NEW SCHEME AND TO CHARGE FEES BEYOND THE MEANS OF POORER FAMILIES, MR BRIDGE SAID THIS CONCERN MIGHT BE UNFOUNDED.

NOTING THAT A FEW SCHOOLS MIGHT DECIDE TO CHARGE HIGH FEES IN EXCHANGE FOR A VERY HIGH STANDARD OF PROVISION, HE SAID THAT EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE SUGGESTED THAT THE OLDER, BETTER ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS WERE LIKELY TO CONTINUE CHARGING LOW FEES.

"INDEED MANY OF THEM ARE RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS AND MAY WELL FEEL THAT THEY SHOULD KEEP THEIR FEES LOW SO AS TO GO ON ATTRACTING CHILDREN OF ALL BACKGROUNDS."

/REGARDING A

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REGARDING A CONCERN THAT AIDED SCHOOLS WOULD LOSE THEIR BEST STUDENTS TO DSS SCHOOLS CATERING TO AN INTELLECTUAL "ELITE" AND THAT THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR WOULD SUFFER AS A RESULT, MR BRIDGE SAID IT WAS ARGUABLE THAT COMPETITION FROM THE DSS WOULD SPUR THE AIDED SCHOOLS TO RAISE THEIR ALREADY HIGH STANDARDS.

REFERRING TO SUGGESTIONS THAT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS BE INCLUDED IN THE SCHEME, HE SAID: "THE IMPLICATIONS OF ADMITTING INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS TO THE DSS MUST BE GIVEN DETAILED CONSIDERATION IF AND WHEN THE SCHEME IS IMPLEMENTED.

"WHETHER OR NOT AIDED AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS FORM PART OF THE SCHEME, THE COMMISSION BELIEVES THAT THE DSS WOULD BE A FAIRER SYSTEM THAN THE PRESENT ONE."

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5+2 SECONDARY SCHOOL STRUCTURE SHOULD STAY
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CHANGING THE STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TO 5+1 OR 3+3 WILL CAUSE TREMENDOUS COMMOTION AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE COMMUNITY, THE HON SELINA CHOW TOLD THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WENDESDAY).

"IT WILL INVOLVE A HUGE EFFORT FOR ALL PARTIES CONCERNED, INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT, THE TEACHERS AND THE PRINCIPALS," SHE SAID.

SPEAKING BOTH AS A PARENT AND A PRODUCT OF THE HONG KONG EDUCATION SYSTEM, MRS CHOW VOICED STRONG OBJECTION TO ANY CHANGE TO THE EXISTING 5+2 YEARS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLING.

MRS CHOW WAS MOVING A MOTION THAT THE COUNCIL "TAKES NOTE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3: THE STRUCTURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS".

SUPPORTING THE EXISTING SYSTEM, SHE SAID: "WE HAVE JUST RID OURSELVES OF THE JSEA, WHICH MEANS WE HAVE FINALLY PUT SOME PEACE BACK INTO THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION.

"IT IS UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED THAT IN SPITE OF NINE YEARS' COMPULSORY EDUCATION, THE ACCEPTED COMPLETION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLING IS AT FORM 5. THE SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATION IS MEANT TO MARK THAT COMPLETION.

"IN ORDER TO GET ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION IT IS ONLY RIGHT THAT STUDENTS HAVE TO BE FURTHER PREPARED. HISTORICALLY WE HAVE TWO YEARS OF MATRICULATION. OVER 90 PER CENT OF HONG KONG'S SCHOOLS HAVE SUCH A STRUCTURE."

/NO CHANGE

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NO CHANGE SHOULD BE CONTEMPLATED UNLESS THERE WAS VERY STRONG JUSTIFICATION FOR DOING SO, SHE SAID.

COMMENTING ON WHETHER A BASIC UNIVERSITY COURSE SHOULD BE THREE OR FOUR YEARS, MRS CHOW SAID THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG'S ARGUMENT FOR A FOUNDATION YEAR WAS UNCONVINCING.

SHE COULD NOT SEE THE LOGIC OF THE UNIVERSITY TAKING OVER THE WORK OF THE SCHOOLS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF QUALITY.

MRS CHOW SAID SHE BELIEVED THAT THE PROBLEM COULD BE SOLVED BY SETTING THE ENTRANCE QUALIFICATION, WHICH WAS A PEROGATIVE OF THE UNIVERSITY ANYWAY.

"IN SPELLING OUT ITS REQUIREMENTS, THE UNIVERSITY WOULD BE HELPING THE SCHOOLS TO DETERMINE THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF MATRICULATION EDUCATION," SHE SAID.

MRS CHOW CRITICISED THE PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE SCHEME INTRODUCED BY THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY UNDER WHICH SECONDARY 6 STUDENTS WERE ACCEPTED ON THE STRENGTH OF THEIR FORM 5 EXAMINATION RESULTS.

IN SO DOING, THE FORM 5 EXAMINATION WAS MADE TO SERVE TWO PURPOSES INSTEAD OF ONE -- AS A SCHOOL LEAVING QUALIFICATION AND AS A UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMINATION.

"THIS DEVELOPMENT DEFEATS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOL LEAVING AS WELL AS THE PREPARATORY FUNCTION OF SECONDARY 6 AND 7," SHE SAID.

MRS CHOW AGREED WITH THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATION THAT THE LENGTH OF ANY INDIVIDUAL COURSE SHOULD BE DETERMINED IN ACCORDANCE WITH EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS BY THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS THEMSELVES.

"HOWEVER, I DO NOT THINK THAT THE LENGTH OF FIRST DEGREE COURSES AT ALL INSTITUTIONS SHOULD IN PRINCIPLE BE THE SAME FOR ANY GIVEN SUBJECT," SHE SAID.

HER REASONS WERE THAT THE AUTONOMY OF INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE RESPECTED, AND THE TRADITIONS OF DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS WARRANTED SPECIAL AND SYMPATHETIC CONSIDERATION.

MRS CHOW ALSO SPOKE IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME, DESCRIBING IT AS "A MOST IMAGINATIVE SOLUTION" TO THE PROBLEM OF HONG KONG'S UNSATISFACTORY SCHOOL SYSTEM.

SHE POINTED OUT THAT HONG KONG'S PROGRESS IN THE LAST TWO DECADES HAD BROUGHT WITH IT A WIDENING MIDDLE CLASS WHOSE AFFLUENCE AND SOPHISTICATION DEMANDED MORE FLEXIBILITY AND VARIETY OF EMPHASIS IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

AS A RESULT, THE PRESENT SYSTEM HAD BECOME FAR TOO RIGID TO MEET PARENTS' ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

/"THE PROPOSAL

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"THE PROPOSAL CONTAINED IN THE REPORT REFLECTS A WELL-CONSIDERED CONCEPT WITH THE PROPER BALANCE AND CONTROL," SHE SAID.

"IT IS ONLY BY OFFERING FREEDOM TO THE SCHOOLS AND THE PARENTS AT AFFORDABLE FEE LEVELS THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE A SYSTEM THAT ANSWERS TO THE NEEDS AND DEMAND OF CARING PARENTS."

MRS CHOW ALSO SAID THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH "ELITISM" IF IT MEANT ACHIEVING THE PEAKS OF EXCELLENCE IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM WHICH WAS ALREADY OFFERING AN ACCEPTABLE STANDARD TO ALL.

"AFTER ALL, AREN'T ALL PARENTS PURSUING THE VERY BEST FOR THEIR CHILDREN? AND SHOULDN'T SOCIETY PROVIDE THE VERY BEST EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE VERY BEST?" SHE ASKED.

MRS CHOW, WHO SPOKE IN SUPPORT OF THE REPORT, DESCRIBED IT AS "AN OUTWARD AND FORWARD LOOKING DOCUMENT AIMING TO CORRECT SOME WRONGS, TO RETAIN AND UPGRADE SOME RIGHTS, AND TO CATCH UP WITH THE TIMES".

SHE HOPED THAT THE RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE REPORT WOULD BE ADOPTED AND IMPLEMENTED.

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TERTIARY EDUCATION FUNDING MUST BE COST-EFFECTIVE

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THE USEFULNESS OF A UNIVERSITY COURSE SHOULD BE JUDGED BY THE END RESULT AS TO WHETHER THAT COURSE COULD ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE OF TRAINING GRADUATES TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE JOB MARKET, THE HON STEPHEN CHEONG SAID TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, MR CHEONG SAID THAT IN EXAMINING THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, HIS ANALYSIS HAD BEEN BASED ON WHAT HE CONSIDERED THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY FOR DEPLOYING RESOURCES FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION.

THE OTHER CONSIDERATION WAS, GIVEN THE PRESSURE IN THE COMING YEARS TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES TO FILL VACANCIES CREATED THROUGH EMIGRATION, WHAT WAS THE BEST SYSTEM THAT WOULD FACILITATE MEETING THIS NEED.

MR CHEONG BELIEVED THAT IT WAS OF CENTRAL AND OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A COMMON ENTRY POINT INTO TERTIARY EDUCATION, AND A COMMON SELECTION POINT BY THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS.

HE SAID THAT THE COMMON ENTRY POINT SHOULD FOLLOW FORM 7 AND THE NORMAL DEGREE COURSES SHOULD BE THREE YEARS.

/MR CHEONG

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MR CHEONG SAID THE SUGGESTION THAT TO ADOPT A FOUR-YEAR POST FORM 6 DEGREE STRUCTURE WOULD BRING HONG KONG INTO LINE WITH INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE WAS A SERIOUS OVER-SIMPLIFICATION.

HE SAID FURTHER THAT, UNDER PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS, THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG WAS IN AN ANOMALOUS POSITION IN THAT IT RECRUITED STUDENTS ONE YEAR EARLIER THAN OTHER INSTITUTIONS, AND THE LENGTH OF ITS DEGREE COURSES WAS FOUR YEARS.

AS THIS ARRANGEMENT CATERED ONLY FOR THE NEED OF STUDENTS OF CHINESE MIDDLE SCHOOLS WHO CONSTITUTED A MINORITY OF THE CU INTAKES, THE ANOMALY SHOULD BE RECTIFIED, HE ADDED.

AS FOR THE CASE PUT FORWARD BY HKU FOR MOVING TO A 6+4 STRUCTURE, BASED ON ALLEGED DEFICIENCIES IN FORM 7 CANDIDATES, MR CHEONG ARGUED THAT IT WAS NOT A CASE THAT STOOD UP TO CLOSE SCRUTINY, FOR IF THERE WERE DEFICIENCIES IN STUDENTS COMING FORWARD FROM FORM 7, THEN SUCH DEFICIENCIES WOULD SURELY BE MUCH MORE PRONOUNCED ONE YEAR EARLIER, AT THE END OF FORM 6.

HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT, SURELY THE RIGHT APPROACH TO REMEDYING SUCH DEFICIENCIES LAY IN DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING SIXTH FORM EDUCATION, AND NOT IN LENGTHENING COURSES IN THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS.

MR CHEONG WARNED THAT, IF THE TWO UNIVERSITIES RETAINED OR ADOPTED A POST FORM 6 ENTRY POINT, THE TWO POLYTECHNICS AND HKUST WOULD HAVE TO FOLLOW SUIT BY INCREASING THE LENGTH OF THEIR DEGREE COURSES BY ONE YEAR, THEREBY RISK JEOPARDISING THE SYSTEM OF EXTERNAL VALIDATION AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION WHICH UNDERWROTE THE QUALITY OF THEIR COURSES.

MR CHEONG NOTED THAT, INDEED, THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH A MOVE WOULD BE VERY SERIOUS.

FORM 7 WOULD NO LONGER BE VIABLE AND WOULD DISAPPEAR ALONG WITH THE A-L EXAMINATION. IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO INTRODUCE A NEW MAJOR EXAMINATION AT THE END OF FORM 6, BOTH TO PROVIDE A CERTIFICATE FOR EXIT AND TO SERVE AS AN ENTRY QUALIFICATION FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION.

"IN THIS SITUATION, THE HKCEE EXAMINATION AT THE END OF FORM 5 COULD NOT BE SUSTAINED AND THE RESULT WOULD ALMOST INEVITABLY BE A STRAIGHT SIX YEAR SECONDARY COURSE."

"THIS WOULD IN PRACTICE HAVE THE EFFECT OF RAISING THE SCHOOL LEAVING AGE FOR LARGE NUMBERS OF PUPILS AND WOULD HAVE ENORMOUS RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS."

MR CHEONG POINTED OUT THAT, TO MOVE TO A FOUR YEAR POST FORM 6 ENTRY SYSTEM FOR DEGREE COURSES WOULD ALSO VERY SUBSTANTIALLY RAISE THE COSTS OF EDUCATING EACH STUDENT ENROLLED IN A DEGREE COURSE.

"HONG KONG WOULD THEREFORE BE FACED WITH THE CHOICE OF EDUCATING FEWER STUDENTS FOR THE SAME COST, OR THE SAME NUMBER OF STUDENTS FOR A GREATER COST," HE SAID.

AS MATTERS STOOD, HE BELIEVED THAT THE BEST WAY FORWARD WAS A SERIOUS EXAMINATION BY ALL CONCERNED OF THE ADOPTION OF A CREDIT UNIT SYSTEM FOR DEGREE COURSES AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS.

ON THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS, MR CHEONG SAID THAT THE MAIN CONSIDERATION SHOULD CENTRE ON THE QUESTION OF WHICH MODEL WOULD PROVIDE PARENTS WITH MORE CHOICES, AND THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME MUST BE THE ANSWER.

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CREDIT-UNIT SYSTEM ADVOCATED

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TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO MOVE INTO A CREDIT-UNIT SYSTEM WITH A COMMON ENTRY POINT AT POST-FORM 7, THE HON RITA FAN SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

THROUGH CONTINUED ASSESSMENT AND ACCUMULATION OF CREDIT UNITS, STUDENTS COULD ENJOY THE FLEXIBILITY OF TAKING A LONGER OR SHORTER TIME TO FINISH THEIR DEGREE.

THAT WAS THE BEST WAY TO "EXTRACT OURSELVES" FROM MEANINGLESS ARGUMENT ON THE LENGTH OF DEGREE COURSE, SHE SAID IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3.

MRS FAN SAID HONG KONG'S STUDENTS DESERVED THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE BY HAVING ALL THE POSSIBLE OPTIONS OF DEGREE COURSES IN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS PRESENTED TO THEM AT ONE POINT -- THE COMMON ENTRY POINT.

THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, WHICH UNDERSTANDABLY WANTED TO ATTRACT THE BEST STUDENTS, SHOULD DO SO BY FAIR AND HEALTHY COMPETITION, AND THERE WAS NO VALID REASON FOR ANY INSTITUTIONS TO USE ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES TO SNATCH THE CREAM BY OFFERING PLACES TO THESE STUDENTS ONE OR TWO YEARS EARLIER, SHE SAID.

"THE SENSIBLE APPROACH IS TO IMPLEMENT A COMMON ENTRY POINT, WHICH INCIDENTALLY ALSO MEANS A COMMON SELECTION POINT, FOR ALL FIRST DEGREE COURSES," SHE SAID.

MRS FAN ALSO SPOKE AGAINST CHANGING TO A 3+3 SYSTEM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

"THE 5+2 SYSTEM IS ALREADY IN PLACE, THE CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION AND THE A LEVEL DO RECEIVE RECOGNITION INTERNATIONALLY, AND IMPROVEMENTS TO SIXTH FORMS ARE AT THIS VERY MOMENT BEING IMPLEMENTED," SHE SAID.

THERE WERE INSUFFICIENT GROUNDS TO ALTER THE STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ORDER TO ENABLE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS TO TAKE IN STUDENTS AT FORM 6, SHE ADDED.

MRS FAN ALSO SAID THE EDUCATION COMMISSION HAD IDENTIFIED WHAT THE STUDENTS NEEDED.

THEIR NEEDS INCLUDED BETTER LANGUAGE ABILITY, BROADER GENERAL KNOWLEDGE, AND ABILITY TO THINK ANALYTICALLY AND INDEPENDENTLY.

SHE BELIEVED THAT THE IMPROVED TWO-YEAR INTEGRATED SIXTH FORM COULD MEET THE NEEDS.

ABOLITION OF THE SIXTH FORM WAS NOT THE ANSWER.

SHE ALSO BELIEVED THAT THERE WERE NO SUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION FOR UNIVERSITY TO TAKE OVER FORM 7 FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS BY PROVIDING THE FOUNDATION YEAR.

TURNING TO ARGUMENTS FOR A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE, MRS FAN SAID THERE WAS NO PROOF THAT FOUR YEARS OF EDUCATION POST-FORM 6 WAS BETTER OR WORSE THAN THREE YEARS OF EDUCATION POST-FORM 7.

THERE WAS, HOWEVER, OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE THAT THE QUALITY OF A THREE-YEAR DEGREE AT POST-FORM 7 LEVEL OFFERED BY THE NON-UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONS IN HONG KONG DID REACH THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD.

"PRIORITY CONSIDERATION MUST BE GIVEN TO THE LARGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THOSE OF THEM WHO WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE OFFERED A DEGREE PLACE," SHE SAID.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSION ON TERTIARY STRUCTURE SHOULD BE ACCEPTED, SHE SAID.

THIS WOULD PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALIFIED STUDENTS TO STUDY A DEGREE COURSE, CATER FOR THE MANPOWER NEEDS OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND THE SERVICES, AND ALLOW SECONDARY SCHOOLS TO DO THEIR JOB PROPERLY IN A STABLE STRUCTURE WITHOUT UNNECESSARY DISRUPTION.

ON THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS, MRS FAN SAID THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME (DSS) AS PROPOSED IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT WOULD GIVE PARENTS MORE CHOICE AS TO WHICH SCHOOL THEIR CHILDREN SHOULD ENROL IN.

"WHAT IS PROPOSED IN THE DSS IS NOT ELITISM NOR RETROGRESSION BUT SIMPLY A LITTLE BIT MORE SAY FOR THE PARENTS," SHE SAID.

THE DSS SCHOOLS SHOULD EACH HAVE THEIR OWN CHARACTERISTICS AND TEACHING METHODS, INCLUDING DIFFERENT EMPHASIS ON CURRICULUM AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.

THE IMAGE OF DSS SCHOOLS WOULD NOT BE ONE OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE BUT RATHER OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS OFFERING VARIETY AND SOME EXTRAS, SHE SAID.

"THE DDS PROPOSAL IS INNOVATIVE AND IMAGINATIVE. IT IS WORTH LOOKING INTO FURTHER," SHE ADDED.

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MORE CONSULTATION ON REPORT NEEDED

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MORE TIME AND CONSULTATION IS NEEDED TO FIND THE BEST SOLUTION TO HONG KONG'S EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN TOTALITY, THE HON PETER POON SUGGESTED IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN THE MOTION DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR POON SAID IN VIEW OF THE DIVERGENT VIEWS EXPRESSED AFTER THE REPORT'S PUBLICATION, ANY ARBITRARY OR SIMPLISTIC SOLUTION IMPOSED HASTILY ON HONG KONG'S TERTIARY EDUCATION MIGHT DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

HE CALLED ON ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS TO CO-OPERATE AND CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS SEEKING A BETTER SOLUTION FOR IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND INCREASING THE NUMBER OF GRADUATES WITHIN THE AMBIT OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL IDEALS AND THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

REFERRING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PREFERRED CHOICE OF A TWO-YEAR FORM 6 COURSE AND A FOUR-YEAR SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, MR POON SAID HE COULD NOT SEE WHY FLEXIBILITY HAD TO BE RULED OUT COMPLETELY.

"THE TOTAL INTAKE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG AND THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY IS FIXED UNDER THE PRESENT SYSTEM.

"HAVING A RIGID UNIFIED MATRICULATION POINT AT FORM 7 WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBSTANTIAL OUTFLOW OF STUDENTS AFTER FORM 6 TO OVERSEAS COUNTRIES.

"INSTEAD, IT MAY EVEN WORSEN THE SITUATION IF STUDENTS ARE DENIED THE AVENUE OF ENTERING A UNIVERSITY AFTER FORM 6 IN HONG KONG," HE SAID.

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"AS TO THE SUGGESTION THAT THE BASIC LENGTH FOR MOST DEGREE COURSES OF A SIMILAR NATURE IS TO BE FIXED TO BE THREE YEARS, THIS WILL INFRINGE ON THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM OF THE TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ESPECIALLY THE UNIVERSITIES, WHICH USUALLY DEFEND THEIR AUTONOMY VIGOROUSLY.

"EACH SUCH INSTITUTION HAS ITS OWN FINE TRADITION AND COMPLETE STANDARDISATION IS HARDLY DESIRABLE."

FOR INSTANCE, THE LACK OF FLEXIBILITY AND PROBABLE SACRIFICE OF THE FINE TRADITIONS OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY'S FOUR-YEAR BASIC SYSTEM OF BILINGUAL AND BROAD-BASED EDUCATION, FOSTERED SO HARD FOR OVER 25 YEARS WITH A SUCCESSFUL RECORD, MIGHT NOT BE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF HONG KONG AND MIGHT NOT ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF PRODUCING DIFFERENT KINDS OF GRADUATES.

MR POON PREFERRED OPTION C OF THE REPORT PENDING AN OVERALL IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF THE WHOLE SITUATION IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT DISCUSSIONS.

"THERE IS NO REASON WHY THE 'FREEDOM TO CHOOSE' SHOULD BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THE STUDENTS TO ENTER UNIVERSITY IN HONG KONG, ESPECIALLY NOW WHEN A JOINT ADMISSION SCHEME HAS BEEN AGREED IN PRINCIPLE BY BOTH THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG AND THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY SO THAT THE DISRUPTION OF THE PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE SYSTEM OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY IS GREATLY REDUCED BY SUCH PROPOSED CHANGE," HE CONTINUED.

MR POON ALSO DOUBTED THE NEED FOR THE UNIVERSITY AND POLYTECHNIC GRANTS COMMITTEE TO GRANT FUNDS FOR ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR FOUR YEAR COURSES AFTER FORM 7 UNLESS ANY PARTICULAR REQUEST FOR THE ADDITIONAL YEAR WAS FULLY JUSTIFIED AND FINANCES PERMITTED.

THIS WAS BECAUSE SUCH TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS HAD THEIR PARTICULAR ROLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRYING TO STEREOTYPE THEM ALL WAS UNNECESSARY.

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COMMON ENTRY POINT FOR UNIVERSITIES SUPPORTED

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THE EDUCATION COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION THAT JOINT ADMISSION PROCEDURES BE INTRODUCED BY ALL UPGC-FUNDED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WITH A UNIFIED ENTRY POINT WAS WELCOMED BY THE HON CHENG HON-KWAN IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR CHENG SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE PROPOSED UNIFIED ENTRY SYSTEM AFTER FORM 7 WOULD ENABLE A WORTHWHILE SIXTH FORM EDUCATION TO BE DEVELOPED WITH A BROADENED CURRICULUM.

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HE ALSO AGREED THAT BY DOING SO THE UNREASONABLE PRESSURE ON STUDENTS WHICH AROSE FROM THE NEED TO TAKE PART IN A NUMBER OF EXAMINATIONS TO MAXIMISE THEIR CHANCES OF ENTRY TO HIGHER EDUCATION WOULD BE LARGELY RELIEVED.

THE FIERCE COMPETITION BETWEEN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WOULD BE EASED ACCORDINGLY.

ON THE LENGTH OF FIRST DEGREE COURSES, MR CHENG STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOPTING A CREDIT UNIT SYSTEM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WHEREBY THE STUDENTS WERE PERMITTED TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF THEIR ACCUMULATED CREDIT UNITS AS WELL AS A MORE FLEXIBLE TIMING.

HE POINTED OUT THAT THE CITY POLYTECHNIC HAD ALREADY ORGANISED COURSES ON A MODULAR BASIS TO ENABLE THE STUDENTS TO MAKE WIDER APPLICATIONS OF THEIR STUDIES WITH A BROAD OUTLOOK IN THEIR EDUCATION.

THE HONG KONG UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY HAD ALSO DECIDED TO ADOPT THE CREDIT SYSTEM WHICH WOULD MAKE VARIED LENGTH OF INSTRUCTION AND ENHANCED STUDIES POSSIBLE.

THEREFORE, HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE A SYSTEM OF CREDIT UNIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER WIDELY APPLIED TO ALL OTHER TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS.

MR CHENG NOTED THAT ANY MODIFICATION TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WOULD HAVE, TO SOME EXTENT, FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS.

HE FELT THAT ANY AVAILABLE RESOURCES THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE USED FOR EXTENDING THE YEARS OF DEGREE COURSES COULD WELL BE EFFECTIVELY USED FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF TERTIARY EDUCATION.

THE PERCENTAGES OF FIRST DEGREE COURSE PLACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE RELEVANT AGE GROUP WERE MUCH LOWER THAN INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND SHOULD BE REGARDED AS FAR FROM SATISFACTORY, MR CHENG SAID.

"IT IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL FOR US AT THIS STAGE AND IN THE MEDIUM-TERM TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF OUR AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BENEFIT FROM HIGHER EDUCATION AND THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AT A TIME WHEN WE ALL SUFFER FROM THE PROBLEM OF BRAIN DRAIN," HE SAID.

MR CHENG PRAISED THE EDUCATION COMMISSION FOR ITS BROAD VISION AND SENSIBLE RECOMMENDATION FOR FIRST PRIORITY TO BE GIVEN TO INCREASING THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENTERING TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS EACH YEAR.

HE SAID HE SUPPORTED THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION IN RESPECT OF THE STRUCTURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION.

THE IMPROVEMENT THAT WOULD EMERGE FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS, IF ACCEPTED, WOULD BRING ABOUT A UNIFIED SYSTEM OF TERTIARY EDUCATION BEST SUITED TO THE NEEDS OF HONG KONG UNDER THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

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UNIVERSITY INTAKE NEEDS TO BE INCREASED

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THERE WAS AN URGENT NEED TO SPEED UP MANPOWER TRAINING BY INCREASING THE INTAKE LEVEL OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AND RAISING THE EDUCATION STANDARD OF OUR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, THE HON HO SAI-CHU SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN SUPPORT OF THE MOTION ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR HO SAID THE REPORT HAD CAUSED CONCERN AND REACTIONS FROM THE EDUCATION PROFESSION AND INTERESTED PARTIES SINCE ITS PUBLICATION. VIEWS WERE DIVIDED BUT BACKED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE ARGUMENTS.

HE URGED THE AUTHORITIES CONCERNED TO GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION AND WEIGH THE PROS AND CONS BEFORE MAKING A FINAL DECISION.

BEING A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR AND ALSO A PERSON INVOLVED IN THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION AS WELL AS VARIOUS OTHER INDUSTRIES, MR HO MADE SOME COMMENTS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL SECTORS.

"WHAT WE NEED APART FROM THE GRADUATES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ARE A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVERS AS FIELD WORKERS IN VARIOUS TRADES.

"THERE IS A SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF GRADUATES AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL AT PRESENT. THE NUMBER OF GRADUATES FROM OUR TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS CANNOT MEET THE DEMAND OF THE LABOUR MARKET, BEARING IN MIND THAT THE BRAIN DRAIN PROBLEM HAS BECOME MORE SERIOUS RECENTLY," HE SAID.

HE THEREFORE SUGGESTED THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN INCREASE IN THE INTAKE LEVEL OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AND A RISE IN THE EDUCATIONAL STANDARD OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

WITH THIS IN MIND, HE AGREED THAT ALL MATRICULATION COURSES RUN BY SECONDARY SCHOOLS SHOULD ADOPT A TWO-YEAR COURSE STRUCTURE JUST LIKE THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF FORM 6 AND FORM 7.

ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD ADMIT STUDENTS AT A COMMON ENTRY POINT AFTER FORM 7 THROUGH A JOINT ADMISSION PROCEDURE ON THE BASIS OF THE PREFERENCES AND ACADEMIC RESULTS OF THE CANDIDATES, HE SAID.

MR HO EXPLAINED THAT THE MERIT OF SUCH A SYSTEM WAS THAT THE PRESENT DISCREPANCIES ARISING FROM THE ADMISSION SYSTEMS OPERATED BY THE TWO UNIVERSITIES COULD BE AVOIDED.

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"AN ADDED ADVANTAGE OF SUCH A TWO-YEAR MATRICULATION COURSE IS THAT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS CAN BENEFIT BY EQUIPPING THEMSELVES WITH ONE MORE YEAR OF SCHOOLING EVEN IF THEY HAVE TO WORK AFTERWARDS AND ENJOY A BETTER CHANCE OF MEETING THE DEMAND FOR GRADUATES AT THAT LEVEL.

"STUDENTS CAN ALSO BUILD UP A MORE CONCRETE FOUNDATION FOR THEMSELVES IF THEY WISH TO PURSUE STUDIES AT THE OPEN LEARNING INSTITUTE IN FUTURE," HE SAID.

AS FOR THE QUESTION OF THE LENGTH OF FIRST DEGREE COURSES - WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE THREE-YEAR OR FOUR-YEAR COURSES - MR HO SAID IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT A SHORTER COURSE LENGTH WOULD HELP EXPEDITE THE TRAINING OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL AND REDUCE GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

BUT HE STRESSED THAT WHAT REALLY COUNTED WAS THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENTS ADMITTED WHICH, IN TURN, DEPENDED UPON THE EDUCATION AT THE SECONDARY OR EVEN THE PRIMARY LEVELS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, HE SAID THE AUTONOMY OF THE UNIVERSITIES SHOULD BE RESPECTED.

IN HIS OPINION, THE LENGTH OF FIRST DEGREE COURSES FOR CERTAIN SUBJECTS COULD BE HANDLED WITH FLEXIBILITY AS RECOMMENDED IN THE REPORT AND A CREDIT UNIT SYSTEM MIGHT PERHAPS BE INTRODUCED TO SUPPLEMENT THAT PARTICULAR RECOMMENDATION.

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PROBLEMS IN DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME

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THE ATTEMPT BY THE EDUCATION COMMISSION TO ANSWER THE NEED FOR IMPROVING STANDARDS IN HONG KONG'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS WAS WELCOME, BUT THE QUESTION THAT REMAINED WAS HOW TO GO ABOUT IT, THE HON HUI YIN-FAT SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MR HUI NOTED THAT THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NINE-YEAR COMPULSORY EDUCATION HAD GIVEN RISE TO THE INCREASING DEMAND BY PARENTS FOR BETTER EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

HE SAID THE PROPOSED DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME, IN ALLOWING PARENTS TO OBTAIN HIGHER QUALITY SCHOOLING, NOT ONLY FULFILLED A GROWING SOCIAL NEED, BUT ALSO PROVIDED INCENTIVE TO EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MORE FREEDOM BEING GIVEN TO THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RESPECT OF FEE CHARGING, STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND SETTING THE CURRICULUM.

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"THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOLS, WHICH ALL ALONG CAME UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL, TO EXERCISE SELF-DISCIPLINE, PURSUE INSPIRED DYNAMISM AND DEVELOP CREATIVE POTENTIALS," MR HUI SAID.

"FOR THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS, THE PROMISE FOR THOSE QUALIFIED TO BE PUT ON PAR WITH AIDED SCHOOLS SERVES AS A STIMULUS TO REFORMS.

"THE MUCH-NEEDED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT WILL INSTIL PRIVATE SCHOOLS WITH CONFIDENCE AND ENTHUSIASM TO ACTIVELY UPGRADE THEIR STANDARDS, THUS ACHIEVING HEALTHY COMPETITION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS."

FOR THE MORE ENTERPRISING PRIVATE SCHOOLS, MR HUI ADDED, THE SCHEME OFFERED A CHANCE TO TURN OVER A NEW LEAF.

FURTHERMORE, THE SCHEME ALSO FELL INTO LINE WITH THE PRESENT TREND OF DECENTRALISATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

BUT THERE WERE PROBLEMS. ONE PROBLEM WAS THAT BY ALLOWING SCHOOLS TO CHARGE THEIR OWN FEES, THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME NOT ONLY BROUGHT ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, BUT ALSO VIOLATED THE PRINCIPLE THAT GOVERNMENT AID WAS ONLY GIVEN TO NON-PROFIT SCHOOLS.

ALSO, THE FREEDOM OF SCHOOLS TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN STUDENTS COULD UPSET THE SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACE ALLOCATION SYSTEM, THEREBY RESULTING IN A RETURN OF ELITISM IN SECONDARY EDUCATION.

MR HUI ADDED THAT THE DISCRETION GIVEN TO SCHOOLS TO DECIDE ON THEIR CURRICULUM POSED A THREAT TO A BALANCED EDUCATION, AND DECREASED GOVERNMENT CONTROL WOULD UNDERMINE THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

TURNING TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS, MR HUI EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THEIR ABILITY TO EMULATE THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND TO UPGRADE EFFICIENTLY THEIR STANDARDS WITHIN THE FIXED TIME LIMIT USING LIMITED PRIVATE RESOURCES.

"GIVEN THAT ONLY 10 NON-PROFIT PRIVATE SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED FOR THE BOUGHT PLACE SCHEME, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ONLY ONE THIRD OF THE EXISTING 67 PRIVATE SCHOOLS WILL QUALIFY FOR THE STANDARDS OF SCHOOL PREMISES SET BY THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME," HE SAID.

HE ALSO SAID THAT PRIVATE SCHOOLS DESERVED A BETTER DEAL FOR THE ROLE THEY HAD PLAYED WHEN THE NINE-YEAR COMPULSORY EDUCATION WAS INTRODUCED BACK IN 1978.

WARNING THAT THE PRIVATISATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS WAS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE WITH OMINOUS IMPLICATIONS, MR HUI CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME AND TO SPELL OUT THE EXACT DEGREE OF AUTONOMY IN FEE CHARGING, STUDENT SELECTION AND CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

ON TERTIARY EDUCATION AND THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSION SYSTEM, MR HUI SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY SUPPORTED A SIX-YEAR SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM FOLLOWED BY A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR THE REASON THAT THIS WOULD RELIEVE EXAMINATION PRESSURES ON LOCAL STUDENTS.

FURTHERMORE, A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY DEGREE COURSE WOULD BRING HONG KONG'S TERTIARY EDUCATION INTO LINE WITH SYSTEMS IN MOST OVERSEAS COUNTRIES.

"WHILE I FULLY APPRECIATE THE ARGUMENTS FOR RETAINING THE EXISTING SIXTH FORM SYSTEM, I TEND TO BELIEVE THAT A BROAD EDUCATION TAILORED TO THE ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES SHOULD BEGIN WITH THE UNIVERSITY," HE SAID.

HE SAID THAT IT REMAINED FOR THE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES TO REVIEW AND DESIGN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS CURRICULUM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE A-LEVEL SYLLABUS AND THE PRACTICAL REQUIREMENTS OF SCHOOL LEAVERS.

AS FOR THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY, WHICH WAS GETTING 80 PER CENT OUT OF ITS INTAKE FROM THE ANGLO-CHINESE SCHOOLS, MR HUI SAID THAT THE PROPOSED 6+6+4 SYSTEM FITTED IN NICELY, REQUIRING ONLY MINIMAL ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES IN ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS.

NOTING THAT THE FOUNDATION YEAR PROPOSED BY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG CARRIED WITH IT TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES, MR HUI SAID THAT IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THE TWO UNIVERSITIES TO ABANDON THEIR PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE SCHEMES TO MAKE WAY FOR A UNIFIED ENTRANCE SYSTEM.

HE SUGGESTED THAT THE UNIVERSITIES CONTINUE WITH THEIR PRESENT SYSTEMS, MINUS THE PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE SCHEME, FOR AN INTERIM PERIOD OF A FEW YEARS BEFORE A UNIFORM ADMISSION SYSTEM AND A TERTIARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME WERE IMPLEMENTED.

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FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE SUPPORTED

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AN EDUCATION SYSTEM OF FIVE YEARS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLUS ONE YEAR OF FORM 6 AND A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY COURSE WAS SUPPORTED BY THE HON MARTIN LEE IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

THIS SYSTEM OF 5-1-4 WAS FAVOURED BY THE TWO UNIVERSITIES, MR LEE SAID IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION REPORT NO. 3.

AS FOR THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC AND THE CITY POLYTECHNIC, WHICH FAVOURED A SYSTEM OF 5-2-3, HE SAID THEY COULD ADJUST THE LENGTHS OF THEIR COURSES IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPOSED ONE-YEAR MATRICULATION COURSE.

/MR LEE

MR LEE SAID HE APPRECIATED THAT THE PROPOSED SYSTEM OF 5-1-4 MIGHT COST THE TAXPAYER MORE MONEY.

"BUT WE MUST REMEMBER THAT WE ARE TALKING HERE ABOUT AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF HONG KONG - NOT FOR THE SHORT TERM - BUT FOR 20 YEARS AND MORE FROM NOW," HE SAID.

MR LEE SAID THAT THE GOVERNOR, IN HIS POLICY SPEECH, HAD REFERRED TO THE "CLEAR RECOMMENDATION" OF THE EDUCATION COMMISSION THAT WHERE MORE RESOURCES WERE AVAILABLE, THE FIRST PRIORITY SHOULD BE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENTERING TERTIARY EDUCATION.

IN OTHER WORDS, HE SAID, THE GOVERNMENT PUT QUANTITY BEFORE QUALITY.

MR LEE CONTENDED THAT HONG KONG NEEDED BOTH QUALITY AND QUANTITY AND, IF NECESSARY, THE TERRITORY MUST BE PREPARED TO SPEND MORE MONEY.

"TO ADOPT A POLICY OF CHURNING OUT A GREATER NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES OF A LOWER CALIBRE IS SIMPLY NOT THE RIGHT WAY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM," HE SAID.

MR LEE SAID HE NOTED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD GIVEN AN ASSURANCE IT WOULD NOT DICTATE TO ANY TERTIARY INSTITUTION THAT IT SHOULD HAVE A THREE-YEAR OR A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE, AND THAT EACH INSTITUTION WAS FREE TO DECIDE ON THE LENGTH OF ITS COURSES.

BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT CLEARLY STATED THAT THE UNIVERSITY AND POLYTECHNIC GRANTS COMMITTEE (UPGC) WOULD CONTINUE TO USE ITS OWN ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL CRITERIA TO JUDGE INDIVIDUAL CASES IN THE LIGHT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY PREVAILING AT THE TIME.

AND SO, IF THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG WERE TO APPROACH THE UPGC FOR FUNDS FOR A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE, AND THE PREVAILING GOVERNMENT POLICY WAS THAT IT SHOULD BE A THREE-YEAR COURSE, THEN THE UPGC WOULD ONLY GRANT FUNDS FOR THREE YEARS.

THUS THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS DID NOT ENJOY REAL FREEDOM IN DECIDING ON THE LENGTH OF THEIR COURSES, HE SAID.

"OR PUT IN ANOTHER WAY: THE GOVERNMENT GIVES THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM TO THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WITH ONE HAND, AND TAKES IT BACK WITH THE OTHER," HE ADDED.

MR LEE ALSO EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN OVER THE EFFECT OF TELEVISION ON CHILDREN.

"WHAT WE NEED IS A HIGH-POWERED COMMISSION CONSISTING OF HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS FROM ALL RELEVANT GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND EXPERTS IN EDUCATION, CHILD PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK AND IN THE TV FIELD, AS WELL AS PARENTS AND OTHER CONCERNED PERSONS, TO LOOK INTO THESE UNKNOWN AREAS WHICH AFFECT THE LIVES OF ALL OUR CHILDREN," HE SAID.

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SUMMER TEACHING PROGRAMME ADVOCATED

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THE IDEA OF INTRODUCING A SUMMER TEACHING PROGRAMME TO SUPPLEMENT A THREE-YEAR COURSE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTES WAS SUPPORTED BY DR THE HON DANIEL TSE IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

IF THE PROPOSAL WERE ACCEPTED, INSTITUTIONS WOULD GAIN THE EQUIVALENT OF ONE HALF OF AN ACADEMIC YEAR'S TEACHING TIME WITHIN THE TIME SPAN OF A THREE-YEAR COURSE, DR TSE SAID IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3.

THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR CAPITAL EXPANSION ON CAMPUS TO ACCOMMODATE THE PROPOSAL, HE ADDED.

"THE EXISTING VERY COSTLY FACILITIES OF THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WOULD BE MORE EFFICIENTLY UTILISED DURING THE LONG SUMMERS," HE SAID.

DR TSE SAID THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BAPTIST COLLEGE WAS THAT GIVEN THE BILINGUAL NATURE OF HONG KONG'S TERTIARY SYSTEM, IF THE RIGOUR AND DEPTH OF THE BRITISH HONOURS DEGREE WERE TO BE KEPT, MORE TEACHING TIME WOULD BE REQUIRED THAN A CONVENTIONAL THREE-YEAR SCHEDULE COULD PROVIDE.

IT HAD BEEN ESTIMATED THAT TWO SUMMER TERMS OF EIGHT WEEKS' DURATION EACH SHOULD GIVE SUFFICIENT ADDED TEACHING TIME TO A THREE-YEAR COURSE, YET WITH PLENTY OF SUMMER HOLIDAYS LEFT FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES, HE ADDED.

"THE NO. 3 REPORT HAS SUGGESTED A SIMILAR IDEA. BUT I WOULD PROPOSE THAT THE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BE GIVEN TO THE INSTITUTIONS AS PART OF THE REGULAR BUDGET PROVISION, AND NOT SOMETHING TO BE CONTENDED FOR AND JUSTIFIED BY THE INSTITUTIONS AS SPECIAL NEEDS ARISE," HE SAID.

DR TSE ALSO SAID IT WAS MOST DIFFICULT TO DESIGN A ONE-YEAR COURSE WHICH WOULD BE SATISFACTORY EDUCATIONALLY TO FILL THE GAP BETWEEN A FIVE-YEAR SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM AND A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE.

"THEREFORE, IF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM IS TO REMAIN UNCHANGED, I WOULD PREFER A TWO-YEAR SIXTH FORM WHICH SHOULD THEN BE MODIFIED TO FIT INTO THE PRESENT TREND IN DEGREE EDUCATION," HE SAID.

DR TSE EXPLAINED THAT BY "PRESENT TREND IN DEGREE EDUCATION" HE HAD IN MIND THE BROADENED CURRICULUM WHICH BOTH THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG AND THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY HAD ADVOCATED, AND TO WHICH THE BAPTIST COLLEGE HAD SUBSCRIBED.

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6 + 4 SYSTEM IS ALMOST UNIVERSAL

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A SYSTEM OF SIX YEARS' SECONDARY AND FOUR YEARS' TERTIARY EDUCATION WAS SUPPORTED BY THE HON PAUL CHENG IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION 'COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR CHENG SAID HONG KONG HAD TO BE BOLD ENOUGH TO CHANGE ITS EDUCATION SYSTEM IF THIS WERE NECESSARY.

THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE IF THE SYSTEM REQUIRED REVAMPING, AND IF IT WERE BETTER IN THE LONG TERM TO REDUCE THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM FROM SEVEN TO SIX YEARS.

"THE 6+4 SYSTEM IS ALMOST UNIVERSAL. ARE WE SAYING THAT ALL THE ACADEMIC EXPERTS AROUND THE WORLD ARE WRONG?" HE ASKED.

HE FURTHER NOTED THAT THE 5+2+3 SYSTEM, WHICH WAS "NOT ONLY ANTIQUATED BUT ALSO UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED", WAS BEING REVIEWED IN THE UK.

"IT IS HIGH TIME WE STREAMLINE THE SYSTEM TO KEEP THINGS SIMPLE AND TAKE SOME PRESSURE OFF PARENTS AND STUDENTS ALIKE," HE SAID.

WHILE HE AGREED WITH THE NEED TO HAVE A COMMON ENTRY POINT TO TERTIARY EDUCATION, HE DISAGREED THAT THIS POINT SHOULD BE SET AT FORM 7.

"MANY SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS HAVE ADMITTED PRIVATELY THAT MOST LOWER SIX STUDENTS CAN HANDLE THE A LEVEL EXAMINATIONS," HE SAID.

"IN THAT CASE, UPPER 6 OR FORM 7 WOULD SEEM TO BE REDUNDANT."

MOREOVER, MOST TERTIARY LEVEL EDUCATORS FELT THAT A FOUR-YEAR PROGRAMME WAS REQUIRED TO PRODUCE QUALITY GRADUATES.

"HONG KONG'S FUTURE DEPENDS LARGELY ON THE ONLY REAL RESOURCE IT HAS, I.E. PEOPLE SKILL. THEREFORE, FOCUS MUST BE ON DEVELOPING QUALITY LEADERS RATHER THAN ON QUANTITY," HE SAID.

"WHILST NO ONE WILL DISAGREE WITH INCREASING THE NUMBER OF PLACES AT TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, WE MUST NOT SACRIFICE THE STANDARDS JUST TO INCREASE THE THROUGHPUT."

MR CHENG SAID THAT, NEVERTHELESS, HE URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO ALLOCATE MORE FUNDS FOR EDUCATION.

HE HOPED THE AUTHORITIES WOULD CAREFULLY RECONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE EDUCATION REPORT IN THE LIGHT OF MISGIVINGS EXPRESSED BY EXPERTS, SUCH AS THE VICE-CHANCELLORS OF THE TWO UNIVERSITIES, BEFORE MAKING A FINAL DECISION ON IMPLEMENTATION.

MR CHENG ALSO EXPRESSED SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE FOR THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME AS PROPOSED IN THE REPORT.

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BACKING FOR INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

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THERE SHOULD BE CONTINUED BACKING FOR NON-PROFIT MAKING INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN HONG KONG, PARTICULARLY THOSE OFFERING BILINGUAL EDUCATION BASED ON A CHINESE HERITAGE, THE HON MARTIN BARROW SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

THIS COULD BE DONE THROUGH LAND GRANTS AND OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT AS RECOMMENDED IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR BARROW SAID IN THE DEBATE ON THE REPORT.

HE SAID THAT HE FREQUENTLY FOUND IN TALKING TO HONG KONG PEOPLE WHO WERE LEAVING -- AND ALSO HEARD FROM THOSE ALREADY OVERSEAS -- THAT THE AVAILABILITY OF THE APPROPRIATE TYPE OF EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN WOULD WEIGH HEAVILY ON THEIR MINDS IN DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO RETURN TO HONG KONG.

"I BELIEVE IT IS RIGHT THAT WE SHOULD DO EVERYTHING TO ENCOURAGE AS MANY PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE TO REJOIN THIS COMMUNITY," HE SAID.

"THESE PEOPLE, WITH OVERSEAS WORKING EXPERIENCE, CAN PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN MAINTAINING HONG KONG AS A VIGOROUS INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CENTRE TO THE BENEFIT OF HONG KONG AS A WHOLE."

MR BARROW ADDED THAT ENGLISH MIGHT HAVE BECOME THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF THESE CHILDREN. BUT THE PARENTS WOULD WISH THEM TO RESUME CHINESE LANGUAGE STUDIES AS WELL.

BILINGUALISM IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE WAS ALSO DESIRABLE FOR ANY CHILD GROWING UP IN HONG KONG, REGARDLESS OF ORIGIN.

MANY MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WERE EQUALLY COMMITTED TO HONG KONG ON A LONG-TERM BASIS, AND THIS MUST BE THE ONLY PLACE IN THE WORLD WHERE LESS THAN TWO PER CENT OF THE FOREIGN POPULATION SPOKE THE LOCAL LANGUAGE, HE SAID.

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ATTACKS ON REPORT MISLEADING PUBLIC

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THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3 HAS BEEN OVER ZEALOUSLY AND UNRESERVEDLY ATTACKED IN SUCH A WAY THAT PEOPLE ARE BEING MISLED ON THE ISSUE, THE HON DAVID CHEUNG TOLD THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MR CHEUNG SAID THAT, WHEN LOOKING AT THE PROPOSALS IN THE REPORT, ONE SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THE OVERALL PICTURE OF EDUCATION IN HONG KONG; THE WELL-BEING OF ALL STUDENTS; AND THE POSSIBLE DISRUPTION TO THE SYSTEM AS WELL AS THE UNIQUENESS OF HONG KONG AS A DENSELY POPULATED PLACE.

/HE SAID

HE SAID THAT, FIRST AND FOREMOST, A COMMON ENTRY POINT APPLICABLE TO ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS MUST BE ESTABLISHED.

"THE DIFFERENT ENTRY POINTS HAVE CAUSED SO MUCH PAIN AND AGONY TO SCHOOL TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE IS TREMENDOUS, LET ALONE ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFICULTIES, WASTAGE, AND CONFUSION," HE SAID.

MR CHEUNG SAID HE THOUGHT THAT FIVE YEARS OF GENERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT.

FOR ENTRY TO TERTIARY EDUCATION, HOWEVER, TWO MORE YEARS OF TRAINING AFTER THE COMPLETION OF GENERAL EDUCATION WAS NOT ONLY NECESSARY BUT VITAL.

HE ALSO THOUGHT THAT THE HONG KONG CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO BE USED TO SELECT STUDENTS FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION, AND THAT ALL PUBLICLY FUNDED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD COMPETE FOR STUDENTS ON THEIR OWN MERITS.

MR CHEUNG ALSO SPOKE IN DEFENCE OF THE TWO-YEAR MATRICULATION COURSE, SAYING THAT ITS "NARROWNESS" COULD NOT BE AVOIDED UNLESS THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS PRESCRIBED OTHERWISE AND THE NUMBER OF TERTIARY PLACES INCREASED.

"THE COURSE IS ALSO A VERY MUCH NEEDED QUALIFICATION FOR ENTRY TO PROFESSIONAL DISCIPLINES - ACCOUNTANCY, CHARTERED SURVEYOR, ETC," HE ADDED.

WITH GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISION REACHING 100 PER CENT SOON, SELECTION FOR ABOUT SIX PER CENT TO ENTER TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS MUST BE DONE AT THE END OF FORM 7 WHEN STUDENTS WERE MUCH BETTER PREPARED, MR CHEUNG SAID.

A COMMON ENTRY POINT SHOULD THEREFORE BE AT THE END OF FORM 7.

MR CHEUNG ALSO SAID THAT THE PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE SECONDARY SYSTEM TO 3-3 TO SUIT A FOUR-YEAR TERTIARY PROGRAMME WOULD NOT REMOVE THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE TWO-YEAR SIXTH FORM AS LONG AS INTENSE COMPETITION FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION REMAINED.

THIS WAS BECAUSE, FIRST, IT WOULD REQUIRE STREAMING AT FORM 3 WHICH WOULD BE HIGHLY UNPOPULAR WITH PARENTS.

SECOND, THERE MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH NON-GRAMMAR STREAMS LEADING TO EQUAL PROSPECTS AS GRAMMAR STREAMS.

THIRD, EVEN IF THERE WERE ENOUGH NON-GRAMMAR STREAMS, ENOUGH TEACHERS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO TEACH THESE NON-GRAMMAR STREAMS SUBJECTS.

OTHER DIFFICULTIES INCLUDED REWRITING THE ENTIRE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM, REDESIGNING A PUBLIC EXAMINATION WHICH WOULD WIN INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION, AND THE PAINSTAKING READJUSTMENT OF HALF A MILLION STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS, LET ALONE THAT OF TEACHERS.

MR CHEUNG ARGUED THAT IF ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WENT TO FOUR YEARS, NOT ONLY WOULD THE NUMBER OF DEGREE PLACES IN THE TWO POLYTECHNICS HAVE TO BE REDUCED BUT SO WOULD THE NUMBER OF NON-DEGREE PLACES.

"OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WILL BE FURTHER DEPRIVED OF THE OPPORTUNITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION," HE SAID.

MR CHEUNG DID NOT SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL TO ALLOW AIDED SCHOOLS TO JOIN THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME BECAUSE HE SAW NO MERITS IN A PUBLIC-YET-PRIVATE AND PRIVATE-YET-PUBLIC CATEGORY OF SCHOOLS.

IT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE FOR SOME SCHOOLS TO DRAW GOVERNMENT MONEY AND YET BECOME INDEPENDENT IN STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND IN CHARGING THEIR OWN LEVEL OF FEES, HE SAID.

ON THE QUESTION OF HELPING THE ELIGIBLE PRIVATE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS, MR CHEUNG SAID HE THOUGHT GOVERNMENT HAD THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO DO SO IN VIEW OF THE IMMENSE CONTRIBUTIONS THE SCHOOLS HAD MADE TO EDUCATION.

BUT HE CONSIDERED A TARGET DATE SHOULD BE SET WHEN THESE PRIVATE SCHOOLS, AFTER HAVING IMPROVED THEIR STANDARDS WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT, WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE EITHER TO JOIN THE PUBLIC SECTOR OR TO BECOME STRICTLY PRIVATE.

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RECOMMENDATIONS IN REPORT SUPPORTED

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THE BOUGHT PLACE SCHEME SHOULD BE REPLACED BY THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME AND THERE SHOULD BE NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES TO THE EXISTING 5-2-3 SYSTEM, THE HON LAU WAH-SUM SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN SUPPORT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR LAU SAID HE WOULD NOT RECOMMEND ANY CHANGE TO THE EXISTING EDUCATION SYSTEM UNLESS IT COULD BE JUSTIFIED BY VERY REAL BENEFITS IN THE LONG TERM.

THIS WAS BECAUSE ANY CHANGE IN OR DISRUPTION TO A WELL ESTABLISHED SYSTEM WOULD CERTAINLY RESULT IN ADDITIONAL COSTS AND LOSSES IN EFFICIENCY, AT LEAST FOR A WHILE, AS THE SOCIETY ADJUSTED ITSELF TO THE NEW SYSTEM.

/MR LAU

MR LAU POINTED OUT THAT THE INHERENTLY RESTRICTIVE NATURE OF THE BOUGHT PLACE SCHEME OFFERED LITTLE INCENTIVE FOR IMPROVEMENT AND MADE IT VERY DIFFICULT FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO COMPETE WITH GOVERNMENT AND AIDED SCHOOLS, WHICH WERE PROVIDED WITH MORE RESOURCES.

IN CONTRAST, UNDER THE PROPOSED DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME (DSS), ANY SCHOOLS ATTAINING THE PRESCRIBED STANDARDS WOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY, BUT WOULD RECEIVE NO DEFINITIVE RESTRICTIONS ON SCHOOL FEES AND CURRICULA.

"SCHOOLS WILL THUS BE ALLOWED MORE FREEDOM TO DECIDE THEIR POLICIES," MR LAU SAID.

"THEY WILL ALSO HAVE A MUCH FREER HAND TO IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY AND IN COMPETING FOR THE GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY.

"ULTIMATELY OUR SCHOOL CHILDREN WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS.

"I BELIEVE THE DSS WILL ENCOURAGE FAIR COMPETITION AND, EVENTUALLY, IT WILL RAISE THE STANDARDS OF OUR PRIVATE SCHOOLS. I THEREFORE FULLY SUPPORT THIS RECOMMENDATION."

ON THE EXISTING 5-2-3 SYSTEM THAT LINKED SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION, MR LAU SAID THE SYSTEM HAD EVIDENTLY SERVED THE COMMUNITY WELL AND HAD PRODUCED QUALIFIED GRADUATES WHO HAD EFFECTIVELY MET OUR NEEDS IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SPHERES.

DEFENDING THE TWO-YEAR SIXTH FORM COURSE, MR LAU SAID A TWO-YEAR SIXTH FORM CURRICULUM WHICH INCLUDED PRACTICAL AND TECHNICAL COURSES, IN ADDITION TO GENERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES BASED ON EXISTING A LEVEL COURSES, WOULD SERVE AS A FOUNDATION COURSE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION.

IT COULD ALSO BE A STAGE OF MORE ADVANCED STUDY FOR STUDENTS JOINING THE WORKFORCE ON COMPLETION OF THE COURSE.

MR LAU SUPPORTED THE RECOMMENDATION FOR A COMMON ENTRY POINT TO TERTIARY EDUCATION.

THE SYSTEM WAS FAIR BECAUSE THE ENTRY OR EXIT POINT WAS THE SAME FOR ALL STUDENTS AND ALL INSTITUTIONS, AND NOBODY WOULD GET PRIORITY.

IN ADDITION, MR LAU BELIEVED THAT BY KEEPING THE TERTIARY SYSTEM TO THREE YEARS RATHER THAN FOUR, HONG KONG COULD SAVE ON BOTH CAPITAL AND CURRENT EXPENDITURE, WHICH COULD BE BETTER USED TO EXPAND THE STUDENT POPULATION IN THE UNIVERSITIES.

BESIDES, IT WOULD CAUSE THE LEAST DISRUPTION TO THE EXISTING SYSTEM.

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"WHILE I PERSONALLY RESPECT THE IDEALS OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY, I DO NOT CONSIDER IT APPROPRIATE TO SACRIFICE A UNIFIED EDUCATIONAL POLICY FOR THE BENEFIT OF A MINORITY GROUP," HE SAID.

"WHEN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE FUNDED BY PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, THEY SHOULD PERHAPS GIVE SOME CONSIDERATION TO THE GENERAL INTERESTS OF SOCIETY."

DISPUTING ARGUMENTS THAT HONG KONG SHOULD ADOPT THE 6 + 4 SYSTEM WHICH HAD PROVED SUCCESSFUL IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA, MR LAU EMPHASISED THAT A SYSTEM THAT WORKED WELL IN OTHER COUNTRIES MIGHT NOT BE THE ONE MOST SUITABLE FOR HONG KONG.

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HONG KONG'S EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS INADEQUACIES

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HONG KONG IS OPERATING AN INADEQUATE EDUCATION SYSTEM, THE HON JAMES TIEN TOLD THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3, MR TIEN SAID THAT BY ITSELF EDUCATION WENT ON FOR LIFE AS A MATTER OF QUALITY AND OF PERSONAL ENRICHMENT.

"IT IS NOT THE NUMBER OF YEARS, BUT WHAT YOU ACHIEVE IN THE CLASSROOM THAT COUNTS," HE ADDED.

HONG KONG WAS AN INTERNATIONAL CITY AND THOSE WHO LIVED HERE HAD A RIGHT TO BE ESTEEMED AS MUCH FOR THEIR BRAINS AS FOR THEIR COMMERCIAL ENERGY.

CITING A PART OF THE REPORT WHICH STATED THAT HONG KONG STUDENTS WERE 'TOO SPECIALISED, AND AS A RESULT KNOW LITTLE OF THE WORLD BEYOND THEIR OWN FIELD AND LACK MATURITY, INITIATIVE AND IMAGINATION', MR TIEN SAID AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AT TERTIARY LEVEL WHICH PRODUCED PEOPLE WITHOUT MATURITY, WITHOUT INITIATIVE AND WITHOUT IMAGINATION WAS A STRONG INDICTMENT.

HE SAID THE REASON WHY SO MANY OF HONG KONG'S YOUNG PEOPLE WENT ABROAD FOR STUDY WAS THAT ONLY A FRACTION OF THEM HAD ANY HOPE OF GAINING HIGHER EDUCATION IN HONG KONG - SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TWO AND FOUR PER CENT.

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ON THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE, HE SAID THERE WAS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE.

HONG KONG WAS AMBIVALENT ABOUT ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AND MANY YOUNG PEOPLE REGARDED IT AS A NECESSARY EVIL BECAUSE IT WAS A VALUABLE COMMERCIAL ASSET, MR TIEN SAID.

"THE REPORT STATES THAT MORE RESOURCES SHOULD BE URGENTLY DEVOTED TO BETTER ENGLISH TEACHING. I AGREE," HE SAID.

"BUT WE MUST ALSO LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES TOO, AS SOME RECENT VENTURES HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.

"I FEEL THAT BOTH ENGLISH AND CHINESE MUST BE STRENGTHENED AND IMPROVED BY THE BEST METHODS AVAILABLE."

MR TIEN ALSO AGREED WITH THE PART OF THE REPORT WHICH POINTED OUT THAT ALL PUBLICLY FUNDED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD HAVE A COMMON ENTRY POINT.

"THE LENGTH OF THE DEGREE COURSE IS NOT TREATED DOGMATICALLY IN THE REPORT, BUT I REGRET TO SAY THAT (AS WE HAVE SEEN IN THE SUBMISSIONS FROM THE TWO UNIVERSITIES), IT IS OFTEN TREATED DOGMATICALLY," HE SAID.

"LET US JUST BE A LITTLE MORE PRAGMATIC."

MR TIEN SAID HE PERCEIVED A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED BRAIN DRAIN AND THE LACK OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN HONG KONG.

"I ALSO SEE THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME AS A POSSIBLE WAY TO STEM THE OUTFLOW OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR FAMILIES ABROAD.

"I SUPPORT THE SCHEME DESPITE THE CRITICISMS MADE ABOUT IT IN SOME QUARTERS," HE SAID.

"ELITISM IS NOT NECESSARILY A BAD IDEA IF IT ENSURES EXCELLENCE.

"THIS SCHEME IS NOT FOR THE WEALTHY, BUT RATHER FOR THOSE WHO CAN BENEFIT, INTELLECTUALLY, FROM IT.

"BY 1997, MUCH OF THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT SECTOR WILL BE DRAWN FROM THE LOCAL POPULATION.

"INDEED THOSE PERSONS NOW ENTERING UNIVERSITY WILL BECOME THOSE VERY SAME PEOPLE. THEY ARE THE VITAL FUTURE MANAGERS OF OUR SOCIETY.

"I SUPPORT THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME BECAUSE IT WILL ENCOURAGE STUDENTS OF QUALITY TO BENEFIT FROM FINANCIAL HELP. ULTIMATELY I BELIEVE THAT QUALITY AND MERIT SHOULD BE REWARDED AND ENCOURAGED.

"HONG KONG WILL SURVIVE AND PROSPER IF WE IGNORE THIS REPORT IN SPITE OF, RATHER THAN BECAUSE OF, ITS HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. IN ALL OF THIS THE REPORT HAS MADE A GOOD START."

3-3-4 SYSTEM BEST WAY FORWARD

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A SYSTEM OF SIX YEARS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL AND A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY COURSE WAS SUPPORTED BY THE HON ELSIE TU IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MRS TU SAID SHE HAD COME TO THE FIRM CONCLUSION THAT A 3-3-4 SYSTEM WAS BEST FOR HONG KONG.

UNDER THIS, STUDENTS WOULD BE ABLE TO LEAVE SCHOOL AT FORM 3, AND THOSE WHO WISHED TO CONTINUE WITH THEIR EDUCATION COULD TAKE THEIR FINAL GOVERNMENT EXAMINATION AT FORM 6 BEFORE STARTING A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE COURSE.

SPEAKING IN THE DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO.3, MRS TU SAID THAT WHILE SHE AGREED WITH THERE BEING A FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY COURSE, SHE ALSO BELIEVED THAT THE DURATION OF THE COURSE SHOULD BE FLEXIBLE.

"IF A CREDIT UNIT SYSTEM WERE TO BE INTRODUCED, THERE WOULD BE NOTHING TO DETER A STUDENT OF ABILITY GRADUATING IN THREE YEARS INSTEAD OF FOUR," SHE SAID.

SHE SAID A 3-3-4 SYSTEM WITH A CREDIT UNIT PROVISION AT TERTIARY LEVEL WAS A NEAT, LOGICAL AND NECESSARY WAY TO GO, IN ORDER TO CLEAR UP THE PRESENT CONFUSION AS TO WHAT WAS SECONDARY AND WHAT WAS TERTIARY EDUCATION.

SHE ADDED THAT TO COMPLETE THE SYSTEM, THERE WAS A NEED FOR A FREE SEVEN-YEAR PRIMARY SCHOOL COURSE TO REPLACE THE PRESENT PRIMARY AND KINDERGARTEN SYSTEM.

"I THINK WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT WE HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION CORRECTLY, AND THE FOUNDATION LIES AT KINDERGARTEN" SHE SAID.

MRS TU SAID THAT KINDERGARTENS IN HONG KONG WERE STILL DOMINATED BY THE ELITE.

THIS WAS MOST UNFORTUNATE AS KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION STILL TO SOME EXTENT MAPPED OUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHILD AT THAT LEVEL, RIGHT THROUGH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL AND UP TO TERTIARY EDUCATION.

SHE ALSO SAID THE EDUCATIONALISTS SHE HAD CONSULTED ALL AGREED THAT INCREASED ASSISTANCE MUST BE GIVEN TO SUB-STANDARD SCHOOLS THAT WERE WILLING TO RAISE THEIR STANDARDS TO ACCEPTABLE LEVELS.

THE DIRECT SUBSIDY SCHEME WAS UNANIMOUSLY REJECTED BY THOSE EDUCATIONALISTS, SHE SAID.

"IF PARENTS OR SCHOOL OPERATOR WISH TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN CURRICULUM AND RUN THEIR SCHOOLS FOR AN ELITE CLIENTELE, THEY SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN PUBLIC MONEY TO DO SO," SHE SAID.

THREE-YEAR DEGREE COURSE MOST PRACTICAL FOR HK
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A PROCEDURE OF JOINT ADMISSION TO TERTIARY EDUCATION AND A THREE-YEAR DEGREE COURSE SYSTEM ARE THE MOST PRACTICAL CHOICES FOR HONG KONG, THE HON PETER WONG SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MR WONG SAID HONG KONG HAD HAD VERY GOOD GRADUATES FROM BOTH THE THREE-YEAR AND FOUR-YEAR SYSTEMS, BUT A THREE-YEAR SYSTEM PRODUCED GRADUATES MORE QUICKLY.

"I SUGGEST THAT IN THE YEARS TO COME, HAVING SUFFICIENT GRADUATES OF AN ACCEPTABLE QUALITY WILL BE THE CRUCIAL FACTOR IN THE CONTINUATION OF THE ACCOUNTANCY AND OTHER PROFESSIONS," HE SAID.

MR WONG ALSO MADE A PLEA FOR A HIGHER STANDARD OF ENGLISH.

"I AM NOT AT ALL IMPRESSED BY THE WAY ENGLISH IS TAUGHT IN OUR TERTIARY OR SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS, JUDGING FROM THE RESULTS WHICH WE SEE," HE SAID.

HE SAID THAT A GREAT DEAL OF HONG KONG'S SUCCESS IN THE FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL WORLD WAS ATTRIBUTED TO THE TERRITORY'S USE OF ENGLISH.

"WE CANNOT RELY ON ENGLISH TO BE TAUGHT BY ONLY A FEW IN A SUPER SIXTH FORM OR IN A FOUNDATION UNIVERSITY YEAR -- THAT IN ITSELF HAS PROBLEMS IN DRAWING AWAY HIGH CALIBRE STAFF FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THEREBY DEPRESSING STANDARDS," HE SAID.

MR WONG SUGGESTED THAT ENGLISH BE TAUGHT AND USED AT THE LOWEST LEVELS, EVEN AT KINDERGARTEN, SO THAT ENGLISH WOULD BECOME A NATURAL SECOND LANGUAGE AND HONG KONG WOULD BE TRULY BILINGUAL.

"ONLY THEN CAN WE BE SURE OF OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD DURING THE 50 YEARS AFTER 1997. IF WE SACRIFICE OUR ENGLISH, WE STAND A VERY GOOD CHANCE OF BEING JUST ANOTHER REGION OF CHINA," HE SAID.

HE ALSO SAID THAT AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ACCOUNTANCY FUNCTIONAL CONSTITUENCY, HE WAS NATURALLY INTERESTED IN THE PRODUCTION OF ACCOUNTANTS IN HONG KONG.

IN THE LONG TERM AND WITH 1997 IN MIND, IT WOULD BE UNREALISTIC FOR HONG KONG TO CONTINUE TO RELY ON OVERSEAS-TRAINED ACCOUNTANTS TO LEAD THE PROFESSION.

"WE MUST PUT MORE EMPHASIS ON THE PRODUCTION OF FUTURE PROFESSIONALS THROUGH THE TERTIARY ESTABLISHMENTS IN HONG KONG," HE SAID.

WIDER VIEW ON REPORT URGED

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MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SHOULD ATTEMPT TO COMMENT ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3 FROM A PERSPECTIVE WIDER THAN THAT WHICH REPRESENTS ANY ONE POINT OF VIEW, PROF THE HON POON CHUNG-KWONG SAID TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING IN, THE COUNCIL'S DEBATE ON THE REPORT, PROF POON SAID THE EDUCATIONALISTS VIEW OF TERTIARY EDUCATION STRUCTURE MUST BE BALANCED BY THE REALITIES OF PARENTAL CONCERN, STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS, SOCIETAL NEEDS THROUGH THE EYES OF POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS AND OVERALL AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES.

HE SAID THE THEORETICAL STRUCTURE OF 5+1+4, 3+3+4 OR 5+2+OPTIONAL LENGTH OF THE FIRST DEGREE COURSE WAS MUCH MORE THAN A NUMBERS GAME AND THAT IT REPRESENTED TRAINING LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE.

NOTING THAT THE PRESENT FIRST-YEAR INTAKE OF THE UNIVERSITIES WAS ONLY SIX PER CENT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE RELEVANT AGE GROUP, PROF POON SAID THAT THE SORT OF EDUCATION FOR SOME OF THE OTHER 94 PER CENT OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO ENTERED THE SIXTH FORM AS A TERMINAL COURSE, WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE IDEAL PACKAGE THAT WAS WANTED FOR UNDERGRADUATES.

HE SAID THAT WHILE A FOUR-YEAR FIRST DEGREE COURSE WAS SUPPORTABLE IN UPHOLDING AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HONOURS DEGREES, AN EVEN MORE URGENT TASK AT HAND WAS TO SORT OUT THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE SIXTH FORM CURRICULUM.

PROF POON WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE WORKING GROUP SET UP TO DO THIS JOB WOULD WORK OUT A CURRICULUM THAT NOT ONLY CATERED FOR THE NEEDS OF THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS AND OUR SOCIETY, BUT WAS ALSO FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO ALLOW CERTAIN "HIGH FLYERS" IN THE SIXTH FORMS TO ENTER UNIVERSITY AFTER ONE YEAR.

HE URGED THE GOVERNMENT TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE APPROPRIATENESS OF APPROVING COMMON ADMISSION AFTER SECONDARY 7 AS A MATTER OF POLICY.

IT SHOULD ALSO BEAR IN MIND THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY AS WELL AS TO TAKE HEED OF THE EXPERIENCE OF CERTAIN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAD COPEDED SUCCESSFULLY WITH INTAKE AFTER THE FIRST YEAR OF THE MATRICULATION COURSE.

"IT COULD BE THAT, WITH AN IMPROVED SIXTH FORM CURRICULUM SOME YEARS FROM NOW, IT MAY NOT BE NECESSARY TO INSIST THAT ENTRANCE TO DEGREE PROGRAMMES AT ALL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE AFTER SECONDARY 7," HE SAID.

FINALLY, NOTING THAT "EDUCATION FOR HIGH TECHNOLOGY" WAS AMONG THE SUBJECTS NOW UNDER STUDY BY THE EDUCATION COMMISSION, PROF POON URGED THE COMMISSION TO COMPLETE ITS MONOGRAPH ON THIS SUBJECT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

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MOTION ON EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT PASSED

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THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PASSED A MOTION TODAY (WEDNESDAY) THAT IT TAKE NOTE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION'S REPORT NO. 3.

THE MOTION WAS PASSED BY VOICE VOTE AFTER A DEBATE LASTING ABOUT SIX AND A HALF HOURS.

THE HON SELINA CHOW MOVED THE MOTION, WHICH READ: "THAT THIS COUNCIL TAKES NOTE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE EDUCATION COMMISSION REPORT NO. 3: THE STRUCTURE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS".

THIRTY-TWO MEMBERS SPOKE IN THE DEBATE, AND THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER, THE HON RON BRIDGE, REPLIED FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

IN OTHER BUSINESS, THE COUNCIL DEALT WITH THREE QUESTIONS.

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CONDITIONS FOR IMPORTING FOREIGN WORKERS OUTLINED

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EXISTING POLICY STIPULATES THAT FOREIGN WORKERS MAY BE ADMITTED TO HONG KONG PROVIDED THAT CERTAIN CONDITIONS ARE MET, THE SECRETARY FOR SECURITY, THE HON GEOFFREY BARNES, SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MR BARNES WAS REPLYING TO A QUESTION FROM THE HON JAMES TIEN, WHO ASKED WHETHER A LIMITED NUMBER OF FOREIGN WORKERS COULD BE IMPORTED ON A SHORT-TERM CONTRACTUAL BASIS TO WORK FOR SELECTED INDUSTRIES WITHOUT CHANGING EXISTING POLICY.

ELABORATING ON THE CONDITIONS, MR BARNES SAID THAT FOREIGN WORKERS MIGHT ENTER HONG KONG FOR EMPLOYMENT IF:

- (A) THERE IS NO SECURITY OBJECTION AND THEY HAVE NO KNOWN RECORDS OF SERIOUS CRIME;
- (B) THERE IS NO LIKELIHOOD OF THEM BECOMING A BURDEN ON HONG KONG;
- (C) THEY POSSESS A SPECIAL SKILL, KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE OF VALUE TO, AND NOT READILY AVAILABLE IN, HONG KONG; OR
- (D) ARE IN A POSITION TO MAKE A SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMY OF HONG KONG.

/MR BARNES

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MR BARNES SAID EACH CASE HAD TO BE ASSESSED ON ITS INDIVIDUAL MERITS AGAINST THE SITUATION IN THE LOCAL LABOUR MARKET PREVAILING AT THE TIME OF APPLICATION.

WORKERS WERE ALLOWED TO STAY FOR SIX MONTHS INITIALLY AND THEIR STAY WAS SUBJECT TO REVIEW PERIODICALLY.

"EXTENSIONS WILL BE GRANTED IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAILING AT THE TIME OF THE ORIGINAL APPROVAL STILL PREVAIL," HE SAID.

"FOR WORKERS ADMITTED FOR SPECIFIC CONTRACTS, EXTENSIONS WILL BE GRANTED UNTIL EXPIRY OF THEIR CONTRACTS."

IN 1987, SOME 4,800 MIDDLE MANAGEMENT, PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL STAFF FROM A WIDE RANGE OF COUNTRIES INCLUDING JAPAN, THE U.S.A., AUSTRALIA AND SO ON WERE ADMITTED INTO HONG KONG, MR BARNES NOTED.

"ANOTHER 2,800 WERE ADMITTED IN THE FIRST SEVEN MONTHS OF THIS YEAR," HE SAID.

AS FOR WORKERS FROM CHINA, THERE WAS NO GENERAL PROVISION FOR THEM TO ENTER HONG KONG FOR EMPLOYMENT PURPOSES.

NEVERTHELESS, AS MORE THAN 27,000 PERMANENT RESIDENTS OF CHINA ENTERED HONG KONG EACH YEAR LEGALLY THROUGH THE ONE-WAY PERMIT SCHEME, MANY OF THEM INEVITABLY JOINED THE LOCAL LABOUR MARKET, MR BARNES SAID.

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PRESENT TENANT FREE TO BID FOR NEW TENANCY
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THE PRESENT TENANT OF THE PEAK CAFE IS FREE TO BID FOR THE NEW TENANCY OF THE PREMISES, THE SECRETARY FOR LANDS AND WORKS, THE HON GRAHAM BARNES, TOLD THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

REPLYING TO A QUESTION FROM THE HON JAMES MCGREGOR, MR BARNES SAID IT WAS PROPOSED TO LET OUT THE TENANCY FOR FIVE YEARS.

HE SAID THE PEAK CAFE BUILDING WAS GRADED BY THE ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD AS A GRADE TWO HISTORICAL BUILDING, WHICH MEANT IT SHOULD BE PRESERVED IF POSSIBLE.

IN 1974, ON THE BASIS OF THAT GRADING, THE TOWN PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDED ITS RETENTION, MR BARNES SAID.

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"SINCE 1966 THE LAND HAS BEEN HELD ON AN ANNUAL TENANCY TERMINABLE AT THREE MONTHS' NOTICE BY ITS PRESENT PROPRIETOR, WHO UP TILL THEN HAD HELD THE LAND ON CROWN LAND PERMIT.

"THE CAFE NEEDS A LEVEL OF EXPENDITURE ON REPAIRS AND RENOVATION TO PRESERVE ITS STRUCTURE AND TO IMPROVE ITS INTERIOR, WHICH IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH ANNUAL TENANCY.

"IT IS THEREFORE PROPOSED TO LET OUT THE TENANCY FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS WITH APPROPRIATE CLAUSES IN THE TENANCY TO REQUIRE THE TENANT TO RENOVATE THE BUILDINGS," HE SAID.

MR BARNES SAID IT WAS NOT NORMAL GOVERNMENT POLICY TO GRANT FIVE YEAR TENANCIES ON EXTENSIONS OF ANNUAL TENANCIES.

BESIDES, THE TENDERING SYSTEM WOULD ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT THE TENDERERS' PLANS FOR RENOVATION WERE ACCEPTABLE AND APPROPRIATE. "THE PRESENT TENANT IS OF COURSE FREE TO BID," HE ADDED.

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ASSISTANCE GIVEN TO FAMILIES WITH HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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THE GOVERNMENT, IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, DOES TRY TO PROVIDE SYSTEMATICALLY FOR THE NEEDS OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER, THE HON RON BRIDGE, SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

REPLYING TO A QUESTION BY THE HON HUI YIN-FAT, MR BRIDGE SAID THAT THE SERVICES PROVIDED, WHICH WERE SET OUT IN THE REHABILITATION PROGRAMME PLAN, WERE REVIEWED ANNUALLY AND IMPROVED AS FAST AS RESOURCES COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE.

"IN APRIL THIS YEAR THE GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO INTRODUCE A HIGHER DISABILITY ALLOWANCE OF \$1,120 A MONTH TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THOSE DISABLED PEOPLE WHO REQUIRE CONSTANT ATTENDANCE AT HOME.

"THE PURPOSE IS TO HELP LESSEN THE BURDEN OF THE FAMILY IN LOOKING AFTER A SEVERELY HANDICAPPED MEMBER AND TO PROMOTE CARE IN THE COMMUNITY.

"BY APRIL 1990 THE SCHEME WILL COVER ALL AGE GROUPS," MR BRIDGE SAID.

/HE NOTED

HE NOTED THAT THE FAMILY SERVICES CENTRES AND MEDICAL SOCIAL SERVICE UNITS OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT ALSO PROVIDED COUNSELLING SERVICES TO FAMILIES TO HELP THEM COPE WITH THE PRACTICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF LOOKING AFTER SEVERELY HANDICAPPED MEMBERS.

"WHEN REQUIRED, SUPPORTING SERVICES SUCH AS HOME-HELPS, FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, CLINICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AND DAY OR RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS CAN ALSO BE ARRANGED."

MR BRIDGE POINTED OUT THAT IN ALL THE SERVICES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONCERNED WITH THE EARLY EDUCATION, TRAINING AND CARE OF THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED, THE PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS WAS EMPHASISED AND ENCOURAGED.

"PUBLIC EDUCATION TO REDUCE PREJUDICE AGAINST THE DISABLED AND PROMOTE THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE COMMUNITY IS ORGANISED ON A REGULAR BASIS BY BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR," HE SAID.

REFERRING TO A FAMILY TRAGEDY IN WHICH A 16-YEAR-OLD MENTALLY HANDICAPPED BOY AND HIS MOTHER DIED ON OCTOBER 13, MR BRIDGE NOTED THAT THIS WAS A SAD CASE.

GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED FOR THE CHILD, MR BRIDGE SAID THAT IN 1977 THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE RUTTONJEE SANATORIUM, WHERE THE BOY WAS RECEIVING TREATMENT FOR TUBERCULOSIS, ARRANGED FOR HIM TO RECEIVE A DISABILITY ALLOWANCE.

ARRANGEMENT WAS ALSO MADE FOR HIM TO BE ADMITTED TO THE WONG TAI SIN DISABLED CHILDREN'S CENTRE. HOWEVER, THE OFFER WAS TURNED DOWN BY THE FAMILY.

IN 1982, THE CHILD WAS REFERRED TO ARRAN STREET CHILD ASSESSMENT CENTRE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF HIS DISABILITIES, AND WAS RECOMMENDED FOR PLACEMENT IN A SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR SEVERELY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN.

"HE WAS OFFERED A DAY SCHOOL PLACE IN 1984 AND AGAIN IN 1985 BUT HIS PARENTS DECLINED BECAUSE OF THEIR PREFERENCE FOR A BOARDING SCHOOL.

"IN SEPTEMBER 1987, AFTER SOME PERSUASION, THE PARENTS AGREED TO HIS RECEIVING HOME-BASED RESOURCE TEACHING, PROVIDED BY A SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR THE SEVERELY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED."

COUNSELLING, PHYSIOTHERAPY AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICES WERE ALSO PROVIDED THROUGH HOME VISITS, MR BRIDGE ADDED.

"EARLIER THIS MONTH THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER APPROACHED THE SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT FOR CHARITABLE FUNDS TO PURCHASE A MORE COMFORTABLE AND ADAPTABLE SEAT FOR THE BOY.

"THE FAMILY WAS INVITED TO ATTEND FOR AN INTERVIEW ON OCTOBER 17, BUT UNFORTUNATELY THE TRAGEDY HAD ALREADY OCCURRED ON OCTOBER 13 WITHOUT ANY APPARENT INDICATION THAT THE FAMILY WAS IN NEED OF FURTHER SUPPORT BEYOND THAT ALREADY BEING OFFERED," HE SAID.

PROVISIONAL TRADE FIGURES FOR SEPTEMBER 1988
* * * * *

HONG KONG'S EXTERNAL TRADE SHOWED SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN SEPTEMBER 1988 OVER A YEAR EARLIER, WITH SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES RECORDED FOR RE-EXPORTS AND IMPORTS, AND RELATIVELY SLOWER INCREASE IN DOMESTIC EXPORTS.

THIS IS SHOWN IN THE PROVISIONAL TRADE FIGURES RELEASED TODAY BY THE CENSUS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT.

THE VALUE OF DOMESTIC EXPORTS IN SEPTEMBER 1988 WAS \$19,950 MILLION, \$2,107 MILLION OR 11.8 PER CENT HIGHER THAN IN SEPTEMBER 1987, WHILE THE VALUE OF RE-EXPORTS INCREASED BY 59 PER CENT OR \$9,728 MILLION TO \$26,230 MILLION.

THE VALUE OF TOTAL EXPORTS (DOMESTIC EXPORTS PLUS RE-EXPORTS), AT \$46,180 MILLION IN SEPTEMBER 1988, WAS THUS \$11,835 MILLION OR 34.5 PER CENT HIGHER THAN IN SEPTEMBER 1987.

THE VALUE OF IMPORTS GREW BY 36.4 PER CENT OR \$11,931 MILLION OVER A YEAR EARLIER, TO \$44,697 MILLION IN SEPTEMBER 1988.

THE VISIBLE TRADE BALANCE IN SEPTEMBER 1988 RECORDED A SURPLUS OF \$1,483 MILLION, EQUIVALENT TO 3.3 PER CENT OF THE VALUE OF IMPORTS.

THIS COMPARES WITH A SURPLUS OF \$1,579 MILLION, EQUIVALENT TO 4.8 PER CENT OF THE VALUE OF IMPORTS, RECORDED IN SEPTEMBER 1987.

PUTTING THE TRADE FIGURES FOR SEPTEMBER IN PERSPECTIVE, THE VALUE OF TOTAL EXPORTS IN THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 1988 WAS \$349,328 MILLION, MADE UP OF DOMESTIC EXPORTS OF \$156,373 MILLION AND RE-EXPORTS OF \$192,955 MILLION.

COMPARED WITH THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 1987, IN VALUE TERMS TOTAL EXPORTS GREW BY \$79,113 MILLION OR 29.3 PER CENT, DOMESTIC EXPORTS BY \$15,234 MILLION OR 10.8 PER CENT, AND RE-EXPORTS BY \$63,879 MILLION OR 49.5 PER CENT.

OVER THE SAME PERIOD, THE VALUE OF IMPORTS GREW BY \$84,459 MILLION OR 31.2 PER CENT, TO \$354,609 MILLION.

A VISIBLE TRADE DEFICIT OF \$5,281 MILLION, EQUIVALENT TO 1.5 PER CENT OF THE VALUE OF IMPORTS, WAS RECORDED IN THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 1988.

DURING THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR, THE VISIBLE TRADE ACCOUNT WAS VIRTUALLY IN BALANCE, WITH A SURPLUS OF ONLY \$65 MILLION.

COMMENTING ON THESE FIGURES, A GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT SPOKESMAN SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE YEAR-ON-YEAR GROWTH RATE OF DOMESTIC EXPORTS IN THE THIRD QUARTER, AT 9.8 PER CENT IN VALUE TERMS, WAS SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN THE CORRESPONDING GROWTH RATE OF 8.9 PER CENT IN THE SECOND QUARTER, IT WAS LOWER THAN THE GROWTH RATE OF 14.6 PER CENT RECORDED IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THIS YEAR.

/AFTER DISCOUNTING

AFTER DISCOUNTING THE EFFECT OF INCREASES IN EXPORT PRICES, THE GROWTH RATES OF REAL TERMS OF DOMESTIC EXPORTS IN THE SECOND AND THIRD QUARTERS WERE RELATIVELY MODERATE.

THE SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT THE CONTINUED UPSURGE IN RE-EXPORTS REFLECTED THE RE-EMERGENCE OF HONG KONG AS A MAJOR ENTREPOT FOR CHINA AS WELL AS FOR THE REST OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION.

THE FOLLOWING TABLE PRESENTS THE PROVISIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE FIGURES FOR SEPTEMBER 1988.

MERCHANDISE:	DOMESTIC EXPORTS	:	\$19,950 MILLION	
	RE-EXPORTS	:	\$26,230 MILLION	
	TOTAL EXPORTS	:	\$46,180 MILLION	
	IMPORTS	:	\$44,697 MILLION	
	TRADE BALANCE	:	\$ 1,483 MILLION	[IN SURPLUS]

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

LATEST 3 MONTHS -----	JUL 88 TO SEP 88 HK\$ MN.	JUL 87 TO SEP 87 HK\$ MN.	INCREASE	
	-----	-----	HK\$ MN.	%
DOMESTIC EXPORTS	60,754	55,347	5,407	9.8
RE-EXPORTS	75,634	48,949	26,685	54.5
TOTAL EXPORTS	136,388	104,296	32,092	30.8
IMPORTS	132,918	97,998	34,920	35.6
TRADE BALANCE	3,470	6,298	-2,828	

SAME MONTH LAST YEAR -----	SEPTEMBER 1988 HK\$ MN.	SEPTEMBER 1987 HK\$ MN.	INCREASE	
	-----	-----	HK\$ MN.	%
DOMESTIC EXPORTS (% OF TOTAL EXPORTS)	19,950 (43.2%)	17,843 (52.0%)	2,107	11.8
RE-EXPORTS	26,230	16,502	9,728	59.0
TOTAL EXPORTS	46,180	34,345	11,835	34.5
IMPORTS	44,697	32,766	11,931	36.4
TRADE BALANCE	1,483	1,579	-96	

/LAST MONTH

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LAST MONTH -----	SEPTEMBER	AUGUST	INCREASE	
	1988 HK\$ MN.	1988 HK\$ MN.	HK\$ MN.	%
DOMESTIC EXPORTS (% OF TOTAL EXPORTS)	19,950 (43.2%)	20,669 (44.8%)	-719	-3.5
RE-EXPORTS	26,230	25,429	801	3.1
TOTAL EXPORTS	46,180	46,098	82	0.2
IMPORTS	44,697	43,827	870	2.0
TRADE BALANCE	1,483	2,271	-788	

CALENDAR YEAR TO-DATE -----	JAN-SEP	JAN-SEP	INCREASE	
	1988 HK\$ MN.	1987 HK\$ MN.	HK\$ MN.	%
DOMESTIC EXPORTS (% OF TOTAL EXPORTS)	156,373 (44.8%)	141,139 (52.2%)	15,234	10.8
RE-EXPORTS	192,955	129,076	63,879	49.5
TOTAL EXPORTS	349,328	270,215	79,113	29.3
IMPORTS	354,609	270,150	84,459	31.3
TRADE BALANCE	-5,281	65	-5,346	

LAST 12 MONTHS -----	OCT 87 TO SEP 88 HK\$ MN.	OCT 86 TO SEP 87 HK\$ MN.	INCREASE	
			HK\$ MN.	%
DOMESTIC EXPORTS	210,488	186,736	23,752	12.7
RE-EXPORTS	246,659	166,270	80,389	48.3
TOTAL EXPORTS	457,147	353,006	104,141	29.5
IMPORTS	462,407	351,668	110,738	31.5
TRADE BALANCE	-5,260	1,338	-6,597	

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1988

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OBJECTIVES OF HOUSING AUTHORITY
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WHILE THE GOVERNMENT DETERMINES THE MAJOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, THE HOUSING AUTHORITY IS GIVEN A FREER HAND TO PURSUE THESE OBJECTIVES WITH ALL THE VIGOUR AND ENTHUSIASM IT CAN COMMAND AND TO USE ITS RESOURCES AS IMAGINATIVELY AND PURPOSEFULLY TO ACHIEVE MAXIMUM RESULTS, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE AUTHORITY, SIR DAVID AKERS-JONES, SAID TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

SPEAKING AT A LUNCHEON MEETING OF THE ZONTA CLUB, SIR DAVID SAID THAT IN 1973 THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING PROGRAMME WAS UNIFIED IN THE HANDS OF A HOUSING AUTHORITY, AND IN APRIL THIS YEAR, THIS AUTHORITY WAS GIVEN A MORE INDEPENDENT ROLE TO CARRY OUT GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN THIS FIELD.

REFERRING TO CALLS FOR THE HOUSING AUTHORITY TO BE A COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT AUTHORITY, HE SAID: "TO BE TOTALLY INDEPENDENT AS SOME CRITICS HAVE SUGGESTED WOULD MEAN NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO RELY ON THE GOVERNMENT FOR ALLOCATIONS OF LAND AND IT WOULD MEAN THAT THE AUTHORITY WOULD BE UNABLE TO RELY AUTOMATICALLY ON GOVERNMENT FUNDS TO MEET ANY DEFICIT CAUSED BY RAISING PRICES AND COSTS.

"IF THAT HAPPENED, IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY MEAN THAT RENTS WOULD HAVE TO BE INCREASED TO COVER ANY SHORTFALL, EITHER THAT OR THE PROGRAMME WOULD HAVE TO BE CUT BACK.

"IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT IF THE AUTHORITY WISHES TO CONTINUE TO ENJOY SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE LEGISLATURE IT CLEARLY MUST BE ANSWERABLE TO THE LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE COUNCILS. IT COULD NEVER BE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT."

THE CHAIRMAN POINTED OUT THAT IN EACH OF THE AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY SUCH AS MANAGEMENT, CONSTRUCTION AND FINANCE, THE AUTHORITY HAS THE SUPPORT, ADVICE AND DECIDING VOICE OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE, BY THEIR EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE, A DEEP APPRECIATION OF THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION THE PUBLIC HOUSING MAKES TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE GREAT COMMUNITY OF HONG KONG PEOPLE.

SIR DAVID SAID THAT 47 PER CENT OF THE PEOPLE OF HONG KONG NOW LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING, SIX PER CENT LIVE IN TEMPORARY HOUSING OF VARIOUS KINDS, AND 47 PER CENT LIVE IN PRIVATE HOUSING.

ON THE HOUSING AUTHORITY'S DOMESTIC RENTS, HE SAID THE RENTAL LEVEL OF ITS NEW ESTATES IS JUST ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE MARKET RENT OF COMPARABLE PREMISES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHILE RENT LEVELS OF OLDER PUBLIC HOUSING REPRESENT ABOUT ONE-SIXTH TO ONE-EIGHTH OF MARKET RENTS.

SIR DAVID EMPHASISED THAT DESPITE THE IMMENSE EFFORT WHICH HAS GONE INTO PUBLIC HOUSING OVER A 35-YEAR PERIOD, THERE REMAINED SO MUCH STILL TO BE DONE.

/ "THIS EFFORT

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"THIS EFFORT TO FIND A SOLUTION TO HOUSING THE PEOPLE OF HONG KONG HAS BEEN A CENTRAL AND ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF HONG KONG GOVERNMENT POLICIES," HE SAID.

"HONG KONG, WHICH PRIDES ITSELF ON LETTING MARKET FORCES FIND MOST OF THE SOLUTIONS TO ITS ECONOMY AND TO ITS PROGRESS, BY PROVIDING SUBSIDISED HOUSING ON A HUGE SCALE, HAS INTERVENED IN NO UNCERTAIN MANNER IN THIS PARTICULAR AREA OF THE ECONOMY.

"THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THIS INTERVENTION HAS HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT AND MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO OUR SUCCESS, TO OUR PROSPERITY AND TO OUR STABILITY.

"WHAT BEGAN AS A HUMANE RESPONSE TO THE INTOLERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES OF 1953 HAS BECOME AND IS NOW AN UNQUESTIONED PART OF OUR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRATEGY," HE SAID.

IN CONCLUSION, SIR DAVID SAID THE "LONG TERM HOUSING STRATEGY", LAUNCHED THIS YEAR, HAS SET AN AMBITIOUS GOAL WHICH WOULD ELIMINATE ALL OUR MOST SERIOUS HOUSING PROBLEMS BY THE END OF THE CENTURY.

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CHANGING ROLE OF CUSTOMS SERVICE
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THE CUSTOMS AND EXCISE DEPARTMENT IS NOT ONLY RESPONSIBLE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT, BUT ALSO UNDERTAKES TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF TRADERS AS WELL AS CONSUMERS, THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF CUSTOMS AND EXCISE, MR. K.S. TONG SAID TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

EXPLAINING THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OVER THE YEARS AT A LUNCHEON MEETING OF THE ROTARY CLUB OF SHATIN, MR TONG SAID THEIR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS IN OPERATIONS AGAINST NARCOTICS, SMUGGLING AND COUNTERFEITING WERE WELL RECOGNISED ALL OVER THE WORLD.

HE ADDED THAT THE DEPARTMENT BEGAN ONLY AS A SMALL TEAM OF 28 OFFICERS IN 1909, BUT HAD NOW DEVELOPED INTO A HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL AND MULTI-FACETED FORCE OF 3,700 MEN WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENFORCING 30 ORDINANCES.

"AMONG ALL CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATIONS IN THE WORLD, HONG KONG CUSTOMS UNDERTAKES THE MOST WIDE-RANGING DUTIES AS TO ENSURE PUBLIC SECURITY, PROTECT REVENUE, INTERDICT NARCOTIC DRUGS, COMBAT SMUGGLING ACTIVITIES, ENFORCE TRADE CONTROLS AND SAFEGUARD CONSUMERS' RIGHTS AND BENEFITS.

"DUTIES COLLECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT LAST YEAR ACCOUNTED FOR ABOUT EIGHT PER CENT OR SOME \$4 BILLION OF THE GENERAL REVENUE OF THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT.

/ "CUSTOMS OFFICERS

"CUSTOMS OFFICERS ARE ON THE FRONTLINE KEEPING GUARD NIGHT AND DAY AT CONTROL POINTS, CARGO HANDLING DEPOTS AND MAIL CENTRES TO CIRCUMVENT ANY ATTEMPTS MADE BY DRUG TRAFFICKERS.

"THEY HAVE TO PROCESS A DAILY AVERAGE OF 180 INCOMING OCEAN-GOING VESSELS, 5,000 VEHICLES, 120 AIRCRAFTS, 150,000 TONNES OF CARGO AND 80,000 ARRIVING PASSENGERS.

"OVER THE PAST EIGHT YEARS, THEY HAVE SEIZED 1,400 KILOGRAMS OF DRUGS WHICH ARE WORTH A TOTAL OF OVER \$740 MILLION.

"OUR EFFORTS IN PROTECTING THE COPYRIGHT AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY RIGHT OWNERS AND CONTROLS ON TRADE LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION OF ORIGIN ARE INSTRUMENTAL IN PROMOTING THE INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE IN HONG KONG."

MR TONG ALSO EXPLAINED THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND EVER-EXPANDING SCOPE OF DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT IN THE POST WORLD WAR II PERIOD WHICH INCLUDED, AMONGST OTHERS, OPERATIONS AGAINST GOLD AND KEROSENE SMUGGLING AND ILLICIT DISTILLERIES IN THE 50'S AND 80'S, AND THE ELIMINATION OF POISONOUS ADULTERATED CHINESE LIQUOR IN 1975.

"HAVING TAKEN UP NEW RESPONSIBILITY TO DETECT NARCOTICS ON LAND IN 1972 AND TO COMBAT PIRACY ACTIVITIES IN 1973, THE DEPARTMENT IN THE 80'S AGAIN FACED THE PROBLEM OF AN UPSURGE IN SMUGGLING ACTIVITIES BETWEEN CHINA AND HONG KONG AFTER CHINA'S LAUNCHING OF THE OPEN DOOR POLICY.

"OVER 900 CASES RELATING TO CHINA-HONG KONG SMUGGLING HAVE BEEN DETECTED SINCE 1981 AND GOODS WORTH \$85 MILLION HAVE BEEN RECOVERED."

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE, MR TONG SAID THE DEPARTMENT WILL PROGRESS TOWARDS HIGH-TECHNOLOGY AND DIVERSIFICATION TO KEEP PACE WITH CONTINUOUS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS.

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JOINT ANTI-ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION OPERATION MOUNTED
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A TERRITORY-WIDE ANTI-ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION OPERATION JOINTLY MOUNTED BY THE POLICE, AND THE LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENTS YESTERDAY (TUESDAY) HAS RESULTED IN THE ARREST OF 65 PERSONS.

THE OPERATION WAS PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUOUS EFFORT TO FLUSH OUT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.

OF THE ARRESTED PERSONS, THREE WERE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS CAUGHT AT THE BORDER. THEY HAVE BEEN SENT TO SAN UK LING FOR REPATRIATION.

/THE REMAINING

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THE REMAINING 62 HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO THE IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT AND THE POLICE FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION. THOSE FOUND TO BE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS WILL BE REPATRIATED.

DURING THE OPERATION, TWO TWO-WAY PERMIT HOLDERS WERE FOUND TO HAVE BEEN WORKING IN HONG KONG. TWO PERSONS SUSPECTED TO BE AIDERS AND ABETTERS WERE INTERCEPTED. THEY ARE NOW ASSISTING THE IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT IN THE INVESTIGATIONS.

A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN REITERATED TODAY (WEDNESDAY) THAT THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF ANY AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.

"OUR LATEST OPERATION SHOULD DRIVE HOME THE POINT THAT THERE WILL BE NO CHANGE TO THIS POLICY. ANYONE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO BELIEVE OTHERWISE IS ONLY CHEATING HIMSELF," HE SAID.

THE SPOKESMAN NOTED THAT APART FROM CONTINUOUS CHECKS THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY, THERE WAS NO LET-UP IN ANTI-ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION EFFORTS AT THE BORDER.

"A HIGH STATE OF VIGILANCE WILL CONTINUE TO BE MAINTAINED BY THE POLICE AND THE SECURITY FORCES BOTH AT THE LAND AND SEA BORDERS," HE SAID.

DURING THE JOINT OPERATION, WHICH BEGAN AT 5 AM YESTERDAY AND ENDED THIS MORNING, THE POLICE HAD STEPPED UP THEIR IDENTIFICATION SPOT CHECKS IN PUBLIC PLACES AND CARRIED OUT CHECKS AT SUSPICIOUS LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY.

AS A RESULT, A TOTAL OF 25,036 PERSONS, 4,891 VEHICLES AND 204 VESSELS WERE STOPPED FOR IDENTIFICATION CHECKS.

A TOTAL OF FIVE PERSONS WERE PROSECUTED FOR FAILING TO PRODUCE PROPER PROOF OF IDENTITY, 26 WERE SUMMONED AND A FURTHER 72 WERE WARNED IN RESPECT OF THIS OFFENCE, WHICH CARRIES A MAXIMUM FINE OF \$1,000.

ON THE LABOUR FRONT, INSPECTORS OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT VISITED 3,322 ESTABLISHMENTS TO WEED OUT ANY ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS WHO MAY BE WORKING, AND TO CHECK THAT EMPLOYERS FULFIL THEIR LEGAL OBLIGATION OF KEEPING PROPER RECORDS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES.

ANOTHER 11 ESTABLISHMENTS WERE FOUND TO BE EITHER KEEPING NO RECORD OR INCOMPLETE RECORDS OF EMPLOYEES, OR POSSESSING NO RECORD AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION.

THE SPOKESMAN REMINDED EMPLOYERS THAT THEY COULD BE FINED UP TO \$50,000 AND JAILED FOR UP TO A YEAR IF THEY WERE FOUND TO BE EMPLOYING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1988

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NORWAY LIBERALISES TEXTILE QUOTAS

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AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED BETWEEN HONG KONG AND NORWAY TO LIBERALISE CERTAIN CATEGORIES IN THE CURRENT HONG KONG/NORWAY TEXTILES AGREEMENT (WHICH RUNS FROM JULY 1, 1987 TO JUNE 30, 1990), A SPOKESMAN FOR THE TRADE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCED TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

WITH EFFECT FROM NOVEMBER 1, 1988, THREE CATEGORIES WHICH ARE CURRENTLY UNDER QUOTA RESTRAINT WILL BE FULLY LIBERALISED. THE EXPORT AUTHORISATION ARRANGEMENT WHICH AT PRESENT COVERS FOUR OTHER CATEGORIES WILL ALSO BE REMOVED.

THE EXPORT AUTHORISATION ARRANGEMENT USED TO ENABLE NORWAY TO MONITOR THE LEVEL OF IMPORTS OF THE RELEVANT HONG KONG TEXTILE PRODUCTS.

THE THREE RESTRAINT CATEGORIES ARE 12 (KNITTED OR CROCHETED COSTUMES, DRESSES, SUITS, SKIRTS AND TROUSERS, MEN'S AND BOYS', WOMEN'S AND GIRLS'); 13 (GLOVES, MITTENS AND MITTS); AND 15 (WOVEN ULSTERS, OVERCOATS, CAPES AND COATS, MEN'S AND BOYS', WOMEN'S AND GIRLS').

THE FOUR CATEGORIES UNDER THE EXPORT AUTHORISATION ARRANGEMENT ARE 9 (KNITTED OR CROCHETED STOCKINGS, UNDER STOCKINGS, ANKLE-SOCKS, SOCKETTES AND THE LIKE, NOT ELASTIC NOR RUBBERISED, EXCEPT WOMEN'S STOCKINGS, SPORT STOCKINGS AND THICK WOOLLEN SOCKS); 10 (WOVEN DRESSES, HOUSECOATS, FROCKS AND GOWNS, WOMEN'S AND GIRLS') (GIRLS' WITH HEIGHT ABOVE 110 CM); 11 (WOVEN SKIRTS, INCLUDING DIVIDED SKIRTS, WOMEN'S AND GIRLS') (GIRLS' WITH HEIGHT ABOVE 110 CM); AND 18 (KNITTED OR CROCHETED NIGHTWEAR, MEN'S AND BOYS', WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' AS WELL AS INFANTS').

THE AGREEMENT WAS REACHED THIS MORNING AFTER THREE DAYS OF CONSULTATION HELD IN HONG KONG.

THE HONG KONG DELEGATION WAS LED BY MR STUART HARBINSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF TRADE. THE NORWEGIAN DELEGATION WAS LED BY MR JOHAN IVERSEN, HEAD OF IMPORT DIVISION, ROYAL NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1988

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LABOUR RELATIONS '88 PRESS CONFERENCE

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THE LABOUR RELATIONS '88 ORGANISING COMMITTEE WILL HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE TOMORROW (THURSDAY) TO ANNOUNCE DETAILS OF THE TERRITORY-WIDE EVENT DUE TO BE LAUNCHED ON NOVEMBER 3.

THE EVENT, AIMED AT ENHANCING LABOUR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, WILL FEATURE A LARGE-SCALE LABOUR RELATIONS CONFERENCE FOR SOME 500 PARTICIPANTS, A SERIES OF SEMINARS AT DISTRICT LEVELS, EXHIBITIONS, A GALA NIGHT ON TELEVISION, QUIZ AND PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTESTS, A TABLE-TENNIS AND CHESS TOURNAMENT, AND A HANDICRAFT COMPETITION.

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE, MR 'CHAN SUI-KAU; THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HONG KONG FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, MR CHENG YIU-TONG; THE CO-ORDINATOR OF THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE, MR TOMMY CHEUNG; AND THE CHIEF LABOUR OFFICER OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT, MR CHOW TUNG-SHAN, WILL SPEAK ABOUT THE ONE-AND-A-HALF-MONTH LONG PROGRAMME.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH WILL BE HELD AT THE IVY ROOM, MANDARIN ORIENTAL HOTEL, CENTRAL, AT 3 PM TOMORROW (THURSDAY).

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CONFERENCE ON LAND DEVELOPMENT IN TSUEN WAN

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A CONFERENCE ON LAND DEVELOPMENT IN TSUEN WAN WILL BE HELD AT THE TSUEN WAN TOWN HALL AT 2.30 PM ON MONDAY (OCTOBER 31).

THE CONFERENCE IS ORGANISED BY THE TSUEN WAN DISTRICT BOARD'S INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE WITH THE AIM OF ENABLING PARTICIPANTS TO GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LAND USE IN TSUEN WAN AND MASSIVE DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE PLANNED.

GUEST SPEAKERS AT THE CONFERENCE INCLUDE TSUEN WAN DISTRICT OFFICER, MR WILLIAM SHIU; DISTRICT LANDS OFFICER/TSUEN WAN, MR HARRY HUI; TOWN PLANNER/TSUEN WAN, MR ANDY TSE AND MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HOPEWELL HOLDINGS LTD., MR GORDON WU.

THOSE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE CAN CALL 0-4149662 FOR SEAT RESERVATION.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

YOU ARE INVITED TO COVER THE CONFERENCE ON LAND DEVELOPMENT IN TSUEN WAN TO BEGIN AT 2.30 PM AT THE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES HALL OF THE TSUEN WAN TOWN HALL NEXT MONDAY (OCTOBER 31).

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TEMPORARY TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS IN TAI PO AND WONG TAI SIN
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TO FACILITATE ROAD MAINTENANCE WORKS AT THE JUNCTION OF ON CHEE ROAD WITH ON CHEUNG ROAD, THE FOLLOWING TEMPORARY TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN TAI PO FROM 10 AM ON FRIDAY (OCTOBER 28) FOR ABOUT ONE WEEK:

- * THE LEFT-TURNING MOVEMENT FROM ON CHEE ROAD WESTBOUND TO ON CHEUNG ROAD WILL BE BANNED.
- * KMB ROUTES 72B, 72X, 74A, 74K AND 74X ON THEIR JOURNEYS TO TAI PO MARKET WILL BE DIVERTED VIA ON PO ROAD, NAM WAN ROAD TAI PO TAI WO ROAD AND PO HEUNG BRIDGE AND WILL NOT OBSERVE THE BUS STOP IN ON CHEUNG ROAD OPPOSITE EIGHTLAND GARDENS.
- * KMB ROUTE 64K WILL BE DIVERTED VIA TAI PO TAI WO ROAD AND WILL NOT OBSERVE THE BUS STOPS IN ON CHEUNG ROAD NEAR EIGHTLAND GARDENS.

MEANWHILE, THE TAXI STAND AT DIAMOND HILL BUS TERMINUS IN WONG TAI SIN WILL BE RELOCATED TO LUNG POON STREET SOUTH OF THE LUNG POON COURT ACCESS ROAD TO FACILITATE DRAINAGE AND SITE FORMATION WORKS.

AT THE SAME TIME, ALL VEHICLES EXCEPT FRANCHISED BUSES WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO ENTER DIAMOND HILL BUS TERMINUS.

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TEMPORARY TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS IN NORTH POINT AND MID-LEVELS
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THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCED THAT TEMPORARY TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN NORTH POINT FROM 10 AM ON SATURDAY (OCTOBER 29) FOR ABOUT FOUR WEEKS TO FACILITATE ROADWORKS.

ALL VEHICLES EXCEEDING SEVEN METRES IN LENGTH WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO TURN LEFT FROM KING'S ROAD EASTBOUND TO TSING FUNG STREET.

MOREOVER, THE NORTHERN KERBSIDE LANE OF TSING FUNG STREET FROM ITS JUNCTION WITH KING'S ROAD TO A POINT ABOUT 26 METRES WEST OF THE SAME JUNCTION WILL BE DESIGNATED A 7 AM TO 7 PM DAILY URBAN CLEARWAY.

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AT THE SAME TIME, THE WESTBOUND CARRIAGEWAY OF KENNEDY ROAD IN MID-LEVELS BETWEEN A POINT ABOUT 20 METRES EAST OF ITS JUNCTION WITH THE SLIP ROAD LEADING FROM COTTON TREE DRIVE AND A POINT ABOUT 10 METRES WEST OF THE SAME JUNCTION WILL BE DESIGNATED AN URBAN CLEARWAY ROUND-THE-CLOCK FOR ABOUT THREE WEEKS TO FACILITATE DRAINAGE WORKS.

NO VEHICLES EXCEPT FRANCHISED BUSES WILL BE ALLOWED TO STOP FOR PASSENGERS OR GOODS WITHIN THE RESTRICTED AREAS.

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FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO TRAFFIC ACCIDENT VICTIM'S FAMILY
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THE SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT TODAY (WEDNESDAY) APPROVED PAYMENT OF \$50,200 FROM THE TRAFFIC ACCIDENT VICTIMS ASSISTANCE (TAVA) FUND TO THE FAMILY OF A MAN KILLED IN A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT IN CHEUNG SHA WAN ROAD ON OCTOBER 11.

THE 35-YEAR-OLD MAN WAS KILLED IN A CRASH BETWEEN A LIGHT GOODS VEHICLE AND A DOUBLE-DECKER BUS AND WAS SURVIVED BY HIS WIFE AND THREE YOUNG DAUGHTERS.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ACCIDENT, STAFF FROM THE DEPARTMENT'S LAI CHI KOK FAMILY SERVICES CENTRE PAID A VISIT TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO RENDER ASSISTANCE.

THE TAVA SCHEME AIMS TO PROVIDE EARLY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO TRAFFIC ACCIDENT VICTIMS, OR THEIR DEPENDENTS, REGARDLESS OF WHO WAS AT FAULT IN CAUSING THE ACCIDENT.

PAYMENTS ARE MADE FOR PERSONAL INJURY OR DEATH ONLY AND IN THE CASE OF INJURY NOT CAUSING DEATH, AN APPLICANT IS ELIGIBLE FOR ASSISTANCE IF AT LEAST THREE DAYS' SICK LEAVE IS EVIDENCED BY HOSPITALISATION OR BY CERTIFICATION BY A REGISTERED DOCTOR.

ALL APPLICATIONS FOR ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE MADE WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF THE ACCIDENT AND THE SCHEME DOES NOT AFFECT THE APPLICANT'S RIGHT TO MAKE OTHER CLAIMS FOR LEGAL DAMAGES IN THE USUAL WAY.

ENQUIRIES AND APPLICATIONS CAN BE DIRECTED TO THE DEPARTMENT'S TAVA SECTION AT THE FIRST FLOOR OF VICTORIA CENTRE, 15 WATSON ROAD, CAUSEWAY BAY OR BY CALLING 5-702410.

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