



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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HK to push for trade liberalisation at WTO conference

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The Director-General of Trade, Mr Tony Miller, today (Friday) outlined Hong Kong's aspirations for the first World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference which will be held in Singapore in December this year, under three broad headings.

He said: "The first is liberalisation and the need to accelerate it. The second is the need to revamp the rules for trade and investment. The third is the problem of the disadvantaged, those whom prosperity has left behind."

Addressing the luncheon of the American Chamber of Commerce, Mr Miller noted that various players had put forward ideas on the agenda for the Singapore meeting and that Singapore's Minister of Trade and Industry, Yeo Cheow Tong, captured the current broad consensus at an informal conference in Brisbane in February.

Minister Yeo's five-point agenda covered: Stock-taking, Unfinished Business, Trade and Environment, Further Trade Liberalisation and New Issues.

"Setting aside debate over which new issues will be eventually included, Hong Kong is happy to support this outline agenda. However, I think we face a bigger challenge in Singapore than these five headings suggest," Mr Miller said.

"Singapore is not just about whether or not we should have a new round of multilateral negotiations. Singapore is about whether we carry on plodding along in the same way, or whether we take a bold new look at what we are doing and how we do it. I think we would be foolish to pass up this challenge."

The Director-General pointed out that multilateral trade negotiations had often been criticised for their glacial speed, saying that one of the reasons they move so slowly was that they had become highly institutionalised.

"When process begins to block progress, I think the time is ripe for looking at new ways of doing things," Mr Miller said.

"So, at Singapore, you can expect us to push for more and more rapid liberalisation. We want to set targets for completely free trade, rather than only agreeing on the next limited incremental cut.

"We want to see several tariffs abolished immediately. We also want to see textiles and clothing removed more rapidly from their current quota straight-jacket."

On trade in services, the Director-General said: "Assuming successful conclusion of initial negotiations in the four service sectors - Basic Telecommunications, Maritime Transportation, Financial Services and Movement of Natural Persons, we want both to build on these and to push ahead in other sectors, for example professional services.

"Government Procurement offers further potential. We are a signatory to the old code, and our own practices are entirely open. We would like to have signed up to the new one, but cannot do so while it simply cements into place existing reciprocal restrictions."

Noting that the United States' appeals in this area would continue to ring hollow for as long as the "Buy American" provisions remained in force and sub-federal agencies were excluded, Mr Miller said: "By all means, let's put Government Procurement in the agenda, but let's talk turkey and not trimmings."

Turning to the rules area, Mr Miller said: "We need global rules for a global economy. Currently, we have a complete mismatch between the way in which business is operating and the trade instruments, which we have developed and elaborated within GATT, now the WTO. When the rules become part of the problem, it is clearly time to re-examine the rules.

"Previous attempts at reform have tended to be piece-meal. They have also been adversarial and not particularly productive, as instanced by some of the haggling over relatively minor amendments to the rules during the Uruguay Round."

As business operates more multi-nationally, he said, the inter-relationship between trade and investment becomes more complex, as do the interlinkages between rules governing both, whether they apply to origin, anti-competitive practices, subsidies or incentives, domestic content requirements or preferential rules.

"There may not be a single solution," said Mr Miller, "there is, however, clearly a need for ensuring that the multilateral rules are coherent, mutually consistent and lend themselves to equitable and economically efficient outcomes rather than the reverse.

The Director-General said: "Hong Kong strongly urges that Ministers agree in Singapore to a broadly based, objective examination of the relevance of the current rules for a globalised economy.

"We accept that that sort of overhaul of the system is going to be difficult. There are huge vested interests in the current system. They will be very difficult to overcome. But unless we start the discussion in an intellectually honest way, we are never going to solve the problem."

He said there was a natural constituency in support of such an overhaul and this was the international business community.

"We need to mobilise that constituency. We need to mobilise also those others who are currently disadvantaged by the system, especially consumers," Mr Miller added.

Noting that the post-war trading system has facilitated the globalisation of enterprise, Mr Miller said it had also enabled many parts of the world, including Hong Kong, to reap quantum gains in prosperity. But prosperity has not been globalised.

"I think that we should examine the current rules and try to establish: are there things about the current rules which work to the disadvantage of the least developed? To my mind, some of the 'Special and Differential' treatment let-outs in the current creed actually inflict wounds rather than help heal them," he said.

"We also need to look at the current pattern of remaining trade barriers. Are there trade barriers or restrictions that are manifestly harming, preventing or inhibiting the least developed countries from beginning the process of industrialisation? Agriculture is clearly one. Textiles and Clothing restraints another

"However, I do not wish to pre-empt discussion. Instead, I urge that, as a priority, we commission a study aimed at identifying those areas of liberalisation that would help the least developed economies most and then act on it with all despatch."

In conclusion, Mr Miller said : "I think that we should aim to lift the level of debate and decision at Singapore. There is no points bringing Ministers together unless the intention is to take serious decisions about direction."

Summing up on Hong Kong's stance, Mr Miller said: "Hong Kong suggests that there are three areas in which this sort of decision is needed.

"The first is to set a bold target for free flows of goods, services and investment world-wide and to agree to work together in building the political momentum needed to realise it. The second is to commence an immediate review of the rules to ensure that they are relevant in today's global economy. The third is to use liberalisation to spread prosperity by seeking ways to help the least developed economies past the take-off point."

End

Latest unemployment and underemployment statistics

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The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the period December 1995 - February 1996 was 3.1%, and the underemployment rate was 2.2%, according to the latest labour force statistics released today (Friday) by the Census and Statistics Department.

The provisional seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the period January - March 1996 was marginally higher, at 3.2%, while the provisional underemployment rate continued to edge lower to 2.0%.

Commenting on the recent labour market situation, a Government spokesman observed that the growth in both total labour supply and total employment accelerated, to 5.3% and 4.6% respectively in the three months ending February 1996 over a year earlier. The increase in total labour supply was the fastest ever recorded since the General Household Survey was first launched in August 1981, while the increase in total employment was amongst the fastest ever recorded from that survey. But as employment was still not catching up with the corresponding labour supply, the unemployment rate thus remained high.

During the period December 1995 - February 1996, the number of unemployed persons with previous jobs was estimated at 86,100. Another 6,700 unemployed persons were first-time job-seekers. The number of underemployed persons was estimated at 69,400.

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were obtained from a continuous General Household Survey. The survey for December 1995 - February 1996 covered a quarterly sample of some 18,000 households or 61,000 persons, selected scientifically to represent the land-based civilian non-institutional population in Hong Kong. Data were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the households sampled.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organisation.

'Seasonally adjusted' refers to adjustment for seasonal variations in the proportion of first-time job-seekers in the labour force.

Detailed analysis of labour force characteristics is given in the report on the General Household Survey which is published four times a year.

The next report covering the quarter ending March 1996 will be on sale at the Government Publications Centre at ground floor, Low Block, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong, by the end of June 1996.

End

Construction output for 1995

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The gross value of construction work, in nominal terms, performed by main contractors (including general and special trade contractors) amounted to \$99.8 billion in 1995, representing an increase of 11.9% over 1994.

According to the results of the Quarterly Survey of Construction Output released today (Friday) by the Census and Statistics Department, the increase was mainly attributable to the intensification of work on major infrastructural projects.

When measured at constant (1990) market prices, the gross value of construction work performed by main contractors showed an increase of 4.2% over 1994.

The gross value of construction work performed at public sector sites rose substantially by 39.4% in nominal terms and 31.1% at constant (1990) market prices. On the other hand, the gross value of construction work performed at private sector sites decreased by 1.5% in nominal terms and 8.1% at constant (1990) market prices.

The gross value of construction work, in nominal terms, performed by general contractors at locations other than construction sites recorded virtually no change. When measured at constant (1990) market prices, it recorded a decrease of 5.4%. Work in this category included minor new construction activities and renovation work at erected buildings and structures.

The gross value of construction activities, in nominal terms, performed by special trade contractors at locations other than construction sites, comprising mainly electrical and mechanical fitting work, increased by 5.6%. However, when measured at constant (1990) market prices, it showed a decrease of 6.0%.

Analysed by end-use, transport projects, which covered airport construction projects, accounted for the largest portion of the gross value of construction work performed at construction sites. The gross value of construction work performed in these projects rose substantially by 33.4%.

Residential building projects (including commercial and residential composite buildings) was the second largest category of construction site work. The gross value of construction work performed in these projects rose slightly by 1.0%.

Commercial building projects continued to constitute the third largest category of construction site work. The gross value of construction work performed in these projects decreased by 2.4%.

Comparing the fourth quarter of 1995 with the fourth quarter of 1994, the gross value of construction work, in nominal terms, performed by main contractors increased by 17.8%. When measured at constant (1990) market prices, it represented an increase of 9.3%.

Compared with the third quarter of 1995, the gross value of construction work, in nominal terms, performed by main contractors in the fourth quarter rose by 12.5%. The corresponding increase measured at constant (1990) market prices was 10.5%, and bearing in mind that the comparison may be affected by seasonal fluctuations.

The gross values of construction work at constant (1990) market prices are derived by deflating the nominal values with appropriate price indices to the price level of 1990.

Owing to the widespread sub-contracting practices in the construction industry, a construction establishment can be a main contractor for one contract and a sub-contractor for another contract at the same time.

The gross value of construction work performed by main contractors, including both general and special trade contractors, covers only those projects in which the construction establishment takes the role of a main contractor, but not projects in which it takes only the role of a sub-contractor.

However, sub-contractors' contribution to projects should have been included in the gross value of construction work performed by main contractors for whom they worked.

More detailed statistics on construction output are given in the "Report on the Quarterly Survey of Construction Output, 4th Quarter 1995". The report is now on sale at \$11 per copy at the Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, Low Block, ground floor, or at the Census and Statistics Department Publications Unit, Wanchai Tower, 19th floor, 12 Harbour Road, Wan Chai. Regular subscription may also be arranged.

Enquiries about the survey may be directed to the Building, Construction and Real Estate Statistics Section of the Census and Statistics Department on 2805 6426.

End

Warning against using explosives or cyanide in fishing

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Local fishermen are today (Friday) reminded again not to use explosives or poisonous substances while fishing at Hong Kong and other territorial waters to avoid breaking the law and damaging the marine environment.

The reminder was issued by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department (AFD) following recent discovery of dead fish by department divers at the sea bed off Yan Chau Tong, Mirs Bay.

AFD's Senior Capture Fisheries Officer, Mr Joseph Sham, said the discovery was a result of the department's routine baseline studies around the area.

"Examination of the fish has indicated that they may have been killed by explosive substances," he said.

Mr Sham warned that under the Fisheries Protection Ordinance, any person using explosives or poisonous substances while fishing at Hong Kong waters would be liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000 and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

The department is actively considering the proposal to increase the maximum fine to \$100,000 to have a more deterrent effect.

"Apart from breaking the law, fishermen using these methods in fishing could endanger their and other people's lives, cause serious damage to the marine environment and eventually reduce fish landings.

"The effects of the explosions would kill many juvenile fish, as was proven by recent findings, and these fish are left unharvested," he added.

To enforce the law and help protect the territory's marine environment and fisheries resources, Marine Police and AFD have stepped up patrols in Hong Kong waters.

Mr Sham took the opportunity to call on fishermen not only to abide by the Fisheries Protection Ordinance, but to also observe marine regulations of neighbouring countries when fishing in their or international waters. The maximum penalty for people convicted of using dynamites or cyanide while fishing at waters in some Southeast Asian countries could be as high as life imprisonment.

End

Witnesses to ferry collision sought

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The Marine Department is anxious to contact witnesses to a collision between a passenger catamaran ferry and a ferry operated by the Hong Kong Ferry Company off the Hong Kong and Macau Ferry Terminal in late March this year.

The accident occurred about 6.40 pm on March 27. A catamaran ferry, Lian Shan Hu, arriving from Panyu, Guangdong, collided with a Hong Kong Ferry off the Hong Kong and Macau Ferry Terminal. Three persons on board the Hong Kong Ferry, Man Loong, which was heading for Tuen Mun were slightly injured.

The investigating officer, Captain Ken Yeomans, is anxious to contact witnesses to the incident. Anyone who might have information on the incident is requested to contact Captain Yeomans on 2852 4576.

End

Amendments to draft Tsim Sha Tsui Outline Zoning Plan

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The Town Planning Board today (Friday) announced amendments to the draft Tsim Sha Tsui Outline Zoning Plan.

The amendments are mainly to impose building height restrictions for five piers and terminals zoned 'Other Specified Uses' (OU) at the western waterfront of Tsim Sha Tsui to prevent excessive high-rise developments in these strategic locations from protruding into the harbour, a spokesman for the Board said.

"These sites include Star Ferry Pier, Ocean Terminal, Kowloon Permanent Pier No. 7, Pacific Club and China Ferry Terminal.

"The building height is restricted ranging from one storey to four storeys and from seven metres to 38 metres above Principal Datum," he said.

Another amendment includes the rezoning of a portion of the 'Open Space' at the junction of Ashley Road and Peking Road to 'Government/Institution/Community' to facilitate the development of a Consumer Education and Information Centre.

"The annotations of the 'OU' sites at Star Ferry Pier and Pacific Club and the Notes of the plan are also amended," the spokesman added.

The amendment plan (No. S/K1/9) is now available for public inspection until May 10 during normal office hours at :

- * Planning Department,
16th floor, Murray Building,
Garden Road,
Central,
Hong Kong;
- * Kowloon District Planning Office,
11th floor, Leighton Centre,
77 Leighton Road,
Causeway Bay,
Hong Kong; and
- * Yau Tsim Mong District Office,
Mong Kok Government Offices,
Ground floor, 30 Luen Wan Street,
Mong Kok,
Kowloon;

Any person affected by the amendment plan may submit written objections to the Secretary of the Town Planning Board, c/o Planning Department, 13th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central, before May 10.

Copies of the draft plan are on sale at the Survey and Mapping Office, Lands Department, 14th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, Hong Kong and the Kowloon Map Sales Office, ground floor, 382 Nathan Road, Kowloon.

End

Tenders invited for construction of Ma On Shan Park

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The Architectural Services Department is inviting tenders for the construction of Ma On Shan Park at On Chun Street, Area 100, Ma On Shan .

The park, with a total site area of about 49,000 square metres, will comprise service buildings, a light refreshment restaurant, a Ma On Shan Mining History display area and a marina plaza.

The project will also include the construction of landscape features and theme gardens, fitness, picnic, sitting-out and children's play areas, pergolas and pavilions.

Works will commence in June this year for completion in September 1997.

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

Tender offer will close at noon on May 10, 1996.

End

Tenders invited for QMH Radiotherapy Department extension

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The Architectural Services Department is inviting tenders for the construction of the Radiotherapy and Oncology Department extension of the Queen Mary Hospital.

The project will comprise the construction of a new seven-storey extension block with a gross floor area of 3,102 square metres, together with refurbishment of the existing Radiotherapy and Oncology Department on the ground floor and first floor of the Professorial Block at the Queen Mary Hospital.

Works will commence in July this year for completion in October 1997.

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

Tender offer will close at noon on May 17, 1996.

End

Tenders invited for slope upgrading works

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The Civil Engineering Department is inviting tenders for upgrading 19 slopes and retaining walls throughout the territory under its accelerated Landslip Preventive Measures (LPM) Programme.

The works are expected to commence in July 1996 for completion in 18 months.

Of these 19 slopes, nine are under the maintenance of Highways Department, seven are with Architectural Services Department, one is with Housing Department, one is with Water Supplies Department and the remaining one on unallocated government land.

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

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

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

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

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

Tender forms for the slope upgrading works contract and further particulars can be obtained from Ove Arup & Partners Hong Kong Limited, 56th floor, Hopewell Centre, 183 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

Tender offer will close at noon on May 17.

End

Proposed submarine cables at Tong Fuk Beach

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The Hong Kong Telecommunication Limited has proposed to lay four submarine cables within an area of about 360 hectares of foreshore and seabed from Tong Fuk Beach on Lantau Island southwards to Hong Kong border.

A Government spokesman said that the project would provide more international channel capacity to meet the rapid growth in international traffic demand for the company.

"Work will commence in June and scheduled for completion by September 30 this year," he added.

The extent of the area affected is contained in a notice published in the Government Gazette today (Friday),

Any person who considers that he has an interest, right or easement in or over the foreshore and sea-bed involved may submit a written objection to the Director of Lands on or before June 19, 1996.

The notice of objection should describe the interest, right or easement of the objector and the manner in which he alleges he will be affected.

The notice (in both English and Chinese) together with related plans can be seen on notice boards posted near the site.

The plan can also be seen at the Lands Department Survey and Mapping Office, 14th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, Hong Kong (where copies can be purchased on order); the Islands District Office, 20th floor, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong and the Mui Wo Sub-Office of the Islands District Office, ground floor, Mui Wo Government Offices, 2 Ngan Kwong Wan Road, Mui Wo, Lantau Island.

End

Health worker registration fee revised

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The registration fee of health workers will be revised from \$150 to \$164 with effect from May 31, 1996.

The revision is set out in the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) (Amendment) Regulation 1996 which was published in the Government gazette today (Friday).

The Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance, with the exception of Section 6, has come into operation on April 1, 1995.

"The Ordinance aims at applying a uniform regulatory framework and a set of minimum standards to all residential care homes for the elderly, to ensure that these homes can provide services of a reasonable standard and that the welfare of the elderly residents is safeguarded," a spokesman for the Social Welfare Department said.

The Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Regulation stipulates requirements relating to the staffing, space, location, design, structure, safety precautions and quality of care to the residents.

"In relation to the staffing requirement, nurses or health workers have to be employed to render health care to the residents.

"Any person who has completed a course of training approved by the Director of Social Welfare in writing can apply to the department for registration as a health worker for the purpose of employment at a residential care home," the spokesman said.

A fee of \$150 is now payable for the registration in accordance with Section 38 of the Regulation.

End

Fire services personnel awarded long service insignia

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Seventy-six fire and ambulance services personnel were today (Friday) awarded long service medals and clasps for their distinguished performance in serving the public.

Forty of them received the Second Clasp to the Colonial Fire Brigades Long Service Medal for their 30 years of service, 27 the First Clasp for 25 years of service, and the remaining nine the long service medal for 18 years of service.

The recipients had altogether contributed 2,037 years of service in the Fire Services Department.

Speaking at the presentation ceremony, the Director of Fire Services, Mr Peter Cheung, said the award of the medals and clasps was a recognition of the officers' diligent performance in providing dedicated services to the community.

Mr Cheung, in his pep talk, told the officers that: "The presentation of the medals and clasps is a solid evidence that you have all discharged your duties loyally and diligently, and that your performances have received the acclaim of your superiors, the department and the Government."

Mr Cheung urged the recipients to persevere the department's tradition in providing efficient and quality services to the public.

End

Firing of 21-Gun Salute to mark Queen's birthday

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To mark the anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's birthday, the Royal Navy will fire a 21-Gun Salute from HMS Starling at precisely noon on Monday (April 22), as she sails through Hong Kong harbour.

When HMS Tamar moved from Prince of Wales Barracks to Stonecutters Island in 1993, gun salutes were fired from a site on the south shore of that island. However, the site was unsatisfactory because it was invisible to the public and it has since been developed by preparatory work for the new naval base for the PLA Navy.

New saluting cannon were, therefore, brought out from the UK so that gun salutes could be fired from a sea-going warship, in full view of much of the city.

This year, the gun salute could be witnessed best from the waterfront, Queen's Pier, Central.

End

Fresh water cut in Sheung Shui

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Fresh water supply to some premises in Sheung Shui will be temporarily suspended from 11 pm on Monday (April 22) to 6 am the following day for detection work on watermains to be carried out.

The suspension will affect all premises in San Fung Avenue, Lung Sum Avenue, San Fat Street, Fu Hing Street, Jockey Club Road and Shek Wu Hui.

End

Firing practice

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Firing practice will take place at the Ha Tsuen/Castle Peak Range on three days next week.

The public is advised not to enter the area when red flags are hoisted.

Following are the dates and times for the firing practice:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>
April 23 (Tuesday)	8.00 am - 4.30 pm
April 25 (Thursday)	8.00 am - 11 pm
April 26 (Friday)	8.00 am - 11 pm

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	<u>\$ million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	1,779	0930	+1,019
Closing balance in the account	1,849	1000	+1,019
Change attributable to :		1100	+1,019
Money market activity	+1,024	1200	+1,024
LAF today	-954	1500	+1,024
		1600	+1,024

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.8 *-0.1* 19.4.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.78	2 years	2802	5.16	98.68	6.02
1 month	4.95	3 years	3901	5.57	98.20	6.38
3 months	5.07	5 years	5103	6.75	99.24	7.05
6 months	5.18	7 years	7302	6.02	93.22	7.42
12 months	5.51	5 years	M502	7.30	100.44	7.31

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$12,386 million

Closed April 19, 1996

End