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Government announces 1997-98 spending plans

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The draft estimates of expenditure for 1997-98 published today (Thursday) provide for significant increases in spending to improve services in areas where they are most needed.

Announcing this today, the Secretary for the Treasury, Mr K C Kwong, said: "The detailed draft estimates reflect the consensus reached in the Budget Expert Group set up under the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group. They have been drawn up in accordance with our long established budgetary principle that, over time, government expenditure should grow no faster than the economy. And they are consistent with Article 107 of the Basic Law which requires the future Special Administrative Region to keep its budget commensurate with the growth rate of its gross domestic product."

"The draft estimates are a clear demonstration of the cooperation between the two sides in the Budget Expert Group. They provide funds not only for the continuity of government services throughout the financial year but also for significant improvements in services where they are most needed," he said.

Government expenditure for the new financial year will total \$202.2 billion.

Mr Kwong explained that of the \$202.2 billion, \$154.4 billion was for recurrent expenses on existing and new services and \$47.8 billion for capital projects.

"Our spending priorities have been decided after consultations held by the Financial Secretary with members of the Legislative Council and community groups during the past year," he said.

Some highlights of our priority spending areas are:

On social welfare our recurrent spending will grow to \$19.5 billion.

The Government will be providing -

* For the Elderly

An extra 1546 residential places
21 Social Centres
4 Day Care Centres and
5 Multi-Service Centres

* For People with a Disability

An additional 1664 residential places
1,150 day places
2 emergency residential care units
A new domiciliary occupational therapy service
5 clinical psychologists and
3 regional centres of the Community Rehabilitation Network for the chronically ill.

* For children with a disability

An additional 240 pre-school places (of which six are extra places for autistic children in special child care centres with additional staff)

* For children generally

An additional 3,149 day nursery places
362 day creche places
30 residential home places and
6 small group homes

* To strengthen family support

An extra 7 family caseworkers and
3 home help teams

* For young people at risk

14 extra school social workers and
1 more outreaching social work team

* 12 Additional medical social workers

* A further improvement to the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme by allowing elderly recipients to receive their monthly standard payment while retiring to Guangdong.

On Health the Government's recurrent spending will grow to \$25.8 billion.

The improvements include -

- * For the elderly
 - 5 new nursing homes with 1,200 beds
 - Enhancement of the general out-patient service and
 - An additional community geriatric assessment team
- * 669 additional hospital beds
- * Enhancement of the specialist out-patient services in 2 hospitals
- * A new general out-patient clinic
- * A new maternal and child health centre
- * A new chest clinic
- * A new oral maxillofacial and dental unit
- * Strengthening of the Student Health Service
- * Extension of the District Health System to Hong Kong Island
- * Strengthening of the pharmaceutical service for the control of the use of drugs
- * Strengthening of the enforcement of food regulations
- * Setting up of a port health unit and a food inspection unit at Chek Lap Kok airport.

On education the Government's recurrent spending will grow to \$38.1 billion.

"By spending more, we are able to make improvements in respect of a number of programmes on basic education," Mr Kwong said. These include -

For Primary education

- * improving the ratio of students to guidance teachers reducing class size
- * an additional 350 graduate teachers converting 26 more schools to whole-day teaching

For primary and secondary education

- * extending civic education to all primary and secondary levels providing induction/extension courses and school-based support services to new arrival children
- * improving financial assistance to needy primary and junior secondary students under the Textbook Assistance Scheme
- * enhancing support for Band 5 students in secondary schools

For special education

- * increasing school grant
- * integrating children with special needs in ordinary schools implementing the recommendations of the Board of Education, including the provision of additional classroom assistants and special grants

Language Proficiency

- * implementing the recommendations in the Education Commission Report No.6 on improvement to language proficiency of students
- * improving teaching and learning of Putonghua in schools

"On law and order, there will be around 600 additional police officers engaged in operational front-line and road traffic enforcement and control duties. And we will invest heavily in improving our emergency ambulance service by providing over 200 additional ambulance staff, 27 additional ambulances and 11 additional ambulance aid motorcycles," Mr Kwong said.

"This impressive list of improvements in our services is made possible by our continuing economic growth. Sustained economic growth will permit further improvements in the future," he said.

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Transcript of Secretary for Treasury's press conference

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Following is the transcript of the press conference on Draft Estimates 1997-98 held by the Secretary for the Treasury, Mr K C Kwong, today (Thursday):

Thank you very much for attending this press conference. May I introduce to you the speakers of the press conference. Mr K C Kwong, Secretary for the Treasury and his two deputies, Mr Kevin Ho and Mrs Carrie Lam, and also the Principal Assistant Secretary for the Treasury, Mr Cookson. After the photo-taking session I will ask Mr Kwong to speak to you.

Mr Kwong: I am happy to introduce to you our 1997-98 Draft Estimates of Expenditure. Today, we will publish the sets of Draft Estimates of Expenditure. Tomorrow, the Appropriation Bill will be gazetted. On next Wednesday, March 12, the Financial Secretary, Mr Donald Tsang, will introduce his Budget to the LegCo, including the income side of the Budget.

This is a unique Budget. It covers the whole year of 1997-98 and covers the transition on July 1, 1997. Through the Expert Group of the JLG, we have had consultations for a long time on the Budget. After 19 rounds of meetings we came to a consensus. The Draft Estimates of Expenditure, we are publishing, therefore, cover a total of 12 months from April 1, 1997 to March 30, 1998. The Draft Estimates of Expenditure are for the provision of continuation of existing services as well as improvements to services and new services. I will highlight the important points on the expenditure side by way of the charts and then I will answer your questions.

Chart 2 is the overview, as I said. The Draft Estimates provide funds for continuation of existing services and for improvements to services. In considering improvements to services we have widely consulted the general public, including members of LegCo. Another consideration is the need to observe the budgetary principle that the government expenditure, over a period of time, should not exceed the trend growth rate of our economy. The trend growth rate is estimated to be 5% per annum.

Chart 3 indicates the relationship between government and public expenditure. Government expenditure is on the left-hand side of the chart. For the year 97-98, government expenditure has exceeded \$200 billion for the first time. There are also expenditures in the realm of public expenditure, including trading funds, Lotteries Fund, Housing Authority and two Municipal Councils. Public expenditure will reach \$248 billion, or about 18.3% of GDP. That is roughly the same as in previous few years.

The next chart is the cumulative growth in government expenditure compared with cumulative growth in GDP since 1986-87. It is a comparison to indicate that in controlling our expenditure, we are able to comply with the principle that the growth rate in government expenditure is similar to that of GDP. We use 86-87 as the starting point because we started our mid-range forecast in 86-87.

The next chart is the analysis of the current public expenditure by policy area group. You will notice that education has the greatest share at 21.2%. Other large sectors include health and social welfare.

The next chart is a similar analysis but it is the analysis of total public expenditure. So apart from recurrent expenditure, capital expenditure is also included. Education still occupies the largest share. Health and social welfare also have a substantial share.

Chart 7 is the recurrent expenditure growth in three policy areas in education, health and social welfare in the year 97-98. Expenditure for education will increase by \$3.7 billion, health by \$3.1 billion and social welfare by \$2.8 billion. Percentage-wise, education will increase by 3.4% in real terms, health by 6.5%, and social welfare by 9.4%.

The final chart shows the recurrent expenditure growth in the same three key policy areas in real terms over the last five years. So you notice that social welfare will grow by 86%, health 49%, and education 30%. So that is my briefing for the time being. I welcome your questions.

Reporter (in Chinese): A question for Mr Kwong. Mr Kwong, at LegCo just now, you mentioned 19 rounds of talks with the Chinese and the expenditure side does not need to be changed. But the Chinese side, Mr Chen Zou'er said that expenditure on social welfare increased too rapidly. Now you say that the expenditure side does not have to be changed. Is it true that the Chinese side has changed their mind after 19 rounds or is it true that the Hong Kong Government itself has adjusted the expenditure?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Let's look at it this way. In terms of expenditure for social welfare, our objective all along is to allocate money to satisfy the service demand to people in need. In our discussions with the Chinese side at the Expert Group, the Chinese side also appreciated this objective. So when we discussed expenditure for social welfare, we could reach a consensus to support this growth.

Reporter (in English): The 96-97 growth rate was like 13.7%. Now it's like 9.4%. And in your pages 8-9 of the booklet it seems to me that CSSA (inaudible) will be included in the 97-98 but only for those elderly recipients who go to the Mainland. Does it mean that there won't be any (inaudible) (inaudible) growth in 97-98?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): I think we have to take into account that from April 1, 1996 we introduced a package of improvements to CSSA payments. That package of improvements was made on the basis of a year long household survey done in 1995 and it cost us something like \$500 million. So we have to consider in 97-98, when we increase expenditure and social welfare, which would be the priority areas. And if you look at the list of improvements set out in the introduction to the estimates you can in fact see that there is a comprehensive list of improvements covering services for the elderly, for children and for various groups who are at risk.

Reporter (in English): Mr Kwong, I am sure you discussed your Budget with Mr Tung Chee Hwa because your Budget is over 1997 and 1998. So what did Mr Tung Chee Hwa comment on your Budget?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): We have indeed briefed Mr Tung on the preparation of the Budget but I think you would accept that I would not let you have the detailed exchanges that we had with individuals.

Reporter (in English): I would like to ask you about the land premium figures. I note that the revised estimate for the current year has gone up to almost \$60 billion. I would like to ask you why there has been such a rapid, by my calculation, 40% increase in land premium figures? Secondly, why there is going to be a similar 43% decrease projected for the coming financial year? And thirdly, given the windfall, if you like, why you could not be more generous on the expenditure side?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): Can you refer specifically to which figure in the published accounts for the funds?

Reporter (in English): I am referring to page 136 in the English language version, revenue analysis of the second half of that particular page: revised estimate for 96-97 of \$59.841 billion, revised estimate for 97-98 of \$34.477 billion.

Mr K C Kwong (in English): The main reason for the much higher revised estimate in 1996-97 is the buoyancy of the property market. In the last few months of 1996 and in the first couple of months in 1997 we see a certain keenness among property developers in agreeing premium assessments by the Lands Department. And in some of the cases, especially concerning modifications of leases, we have had exceptionally high premiums agreed, and that is the main reason for the rather higher figure of \$59.8 billion in 96-97. It is not really realistic to try to compare land revenue between two consecutive years. The main reason is that land revenue is a capital revenue. It depends very much on the size, location, property market situation, etc, and therefore even if you are selling about the same amount of land in a year compared to the year before, you might get very different premia as a result.

As to your final question concerning expenditure and the relationship with revenue. I think there is a common misunderstanding that if we get more in revenue we can spend more. That is not how we control expenditure in formulating our Budget. The cardinal rule that we apply in expenditure control is that the growth in government expenditure should over time not exceed the forecast trend growth rate of the economy as a whole. And therefore while revenue might fluctuate and therefore in a particular year we might have revenue growth well in excess of economic growth, that does not mean that in that particular year we can relax our control over expenditure.

Reporter (in Chinese): About private treaty grants, about the revenue, the same question, just a follow-up. Mr Kwong, you mentioned modification of leases, etc. How about private treaty grants? Why is the figure like that?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, it is the same reasoning. It is about the land market. Moreover, for the same size of the land the revenue may change. It is not meaningful to compare the land revenue of one year with that of another year. For 96-97 we have some high value land along the airport railway for sale.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, in the coming financial year, there is no need to allocate the land premium to the Land Fund. But you still estimate a very low figure for the premium. Why is that so?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): It is not that we estimate on the low side, but for 96-97 you can say that it has been higher than the normal trend. The figures mentioned are in the Suspense Account which have not been shared with the Land Fund yet. So starting from July 1, 1997, the change with regard to the sharing arrangement will not mean that the Suspense Account will suddenly increase its revenue.

Reporter (in Chinese) (follow-up): With regard to the process of the Budget talks, was it that there were concrete proposals from the Hong Kong side and followed by explanations to the Chinese side? Or before you draft your proposals you have heard the views of the Chinese officials and then you draft your proposals, so at the end the Chinese side will accept your proposals?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): I think it is difficult to answer your question. They have been speaking all the time, so how can you say whether we have accepted or we have considered that. Say, in January 96, it was said that we should follow our cautious and prudent approach that we should comply with the Basic Law. That has all along been done. For the specific proposals, I can tell you clearly that the policy branches and the departments carefully considered and come up with the proposals. The Star Chamber considered all the proposals which were then put as a whole proposal to the Expert Group for discussion.

Reporter (in Chinese): I have a follow-up question concerning the Capital Works Reserve Funds Suspense Account. The amount shared by the SAR Land Fund in 96-97 was not very high. Can Mr Kwong explain that?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, the answer is this, that the apportionment of the fund is not done immediately after a piece of land is sold. After we have received the land premium for every quarter, we, after deducting the cost of land development, apportion the premium in the following quarter. The amount in the Suspense Account for 96-97 was very high but a portion of which was income in the last quarter of the financial year from January 1, 97 to 31 March 97. According to our established practice, the funds would be allocated to the Land Fund in the following quarter starting from 1 April.

Reporter (in English): Mr Kwong, I wonder if -- There have been a number of questions asked about the actual Budget planning process and I for one, I just wish you could take us a little bit inside the room and let us know. I mean the agenda was the same - create a Budget. But was there give and take, was it 50/50, did the Chinese side come in with their own plans and concrete numbers? How much give and take was there?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): You would be bored if I say we have approached the preparation of this Budget in a pragmatic, positive and co-operative manner. But that is true. And also, in the preparation process, it was agreed very early on that the detailed preparation would have to be carried out by the departments in the Hong Kong Government. And the proposals all emanated from the Hong Kong Government departments concerned.

Reporter (in English): You said it's pragmatic and there has been co-operation. But late last year Chen Zou'er said something about welfare spending is like a Formula One car racing, and it could crash, bringing with it the whole population. So did that put the brakes on the welfare spending - proposal like that, just like (inaudible) 9.4% increase?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): I think all we need to do is look at the list of improvements that will be introduced in 97-98 to see that we have not put a brake on what we feel are necessary improvements in the social welfare sector.

Reporter (in English): No, but they are the same improvements. Every year you have got those extra places for residential elderly, creches, nurseries.

Mr K C Kwong (in English): I think that is being unfair on the welfare people because they do work very hard in providing additional residential places, additional day-care centres and so on.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, can you explain to us the trend? Now, concerning capital works, the peak has already passed. This affects the total government revenue, and its proportion to the total expenditure. But why is there still such a great increase on capital works expenditure?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Now, you mentioned revenue and you also mentioned expenditure, I don't understand your point. I am talking about expenditure.

Reporter (in Chinese): Overall public expenditure published last week has taken a smaller share in GDP. That is because the peak of capital expenditure has already passed. But in this Budget, we have not seen any decline in capital expenditure.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): What figure are you referring to?

Reporter (in Chinese): If you could refer to page 11 of the booklet, Public Expenditure by Policy Group. For two items there are significant declines but for buildings, lands and planning, there is an increase of 44.9%. For the CWRP volume 2, many items are upgraded to category B. Is it because of the fact that as the peak period of the airport programme has already passed, some other capital works programmes can be upgraded?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, you are talking about something which is not said by me. So I don't know the background of your question. In our introduction to the estimates, page 11, Infrastructure - Buildings, Lands and Planning, one reason for the increase in expenditure is the expenditure on land resumption. For 97-98 there will be an increased expenditure compared with that of 96. I will ask Mrs Lam to tell you the details.

If we take away the expenditure on lands, in terms of public works, following the completion of the airport core programmes, the expenditure on infrastructure for 97-98 will not reach an optimum level. We are considering the public works projects which can be brought forward. As for lands, I will ask Mrs Lam to tell you the details.

DS for Tsy - Mrs Lam (in Chinese): I think, Ms Chan, you are right that when we look at the expenditure of the Capital Works Reserve Fund in volume II after taking away the \$5.5 billion for land resumption, our public works expenditure for 97-98 is about the same as that in 96-97. There is almost no growth in real terms. But we cannot look at infrastructure expenditure on just a one year basis. If you look at 97-98, because of the completion of a number of large scale highway projects related to the Airport Core Programmes, say the Route Three, the Lantau Link and the West Kowloon Expressway, expenditure on roads has declined. There is a decline of 22% in real terms. That said, the significant expenditure increase in Buildings, Lands and Planning is attributable to a number of reasons. First, expenditure involved in land resumption in 1997/98 is expected to increase about three times. Secondly, in line with our objective on building development, we will take projects forward as far as possible having regard to our capability in expanding our works programme, for example, for the education sector. Capital expenditure on education is included under this head. They include projects for primary and secondary schools, special education as well as improvements to existing schools. They will be carried out in full-swing. The expenditure in this area will be in the region of \$2.7 billion.

Reporter (in Chinese): So in other words, because of the completion of the airport construction, certain infrastructure projects which were awarded lower priority can be upgraded and benefited?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): We can't put it this way. Every year when we consider the resource allocation for our works taking into account our requirements for the coming five or ten years. The allocation of resources is not affected by the airport core programmes. It has been affected by planning, land resumption and other preparatory work. These factors affect the start dates of the projects.

Reporter (in Chinese): Just now you mentioned the expenditure for resumption of land in the coming year - it will be increased by three times. I guess it is because the government will redeem the Letters A/B. Now, how many of them have not been exercised for the moment? And you will spend \$2.4 billion to redeem these entitlements in the coming year. Is it true that this \$2.4 billion is enough to redeem all the outstanding entitlements of land exchange?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): For redemption of Letters A/B involving cash redemption, it is about 2.3 hectares in area. We estimate that \$2.4 billion will be adequate.

Reporter (in Chinese): Now, Mr Chen Zuo'er said a few days ago that the Central Government will not take part in the preparation of the Budget for 1998/99. When you formulate the Budget will you still have to consult the Central Government so as to avoid criticism about crashing a Formula One car?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): If you're talking about the Budget for 1998/99, of course that will be within the autonomy of the SAR Government. The Basic Law has clear stipulations regarding the guidelines in the formulation of our Budget.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, well, with regard to the Basic Law procedure, apart from seeking endorsement by LegCo and also the provisional legislature, will you report to the Central Government or will it be submitted to the Central Government for record? What is the whole procedure, the special procedure for this year?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): The Basic Law will only take effect on July 1. Our view is that, say, for the Appropriation Bill, when LegCo pass it on April 16 as we hope, we will complete the appropriation procedure.

Reporter (in Chinese): What will be followed?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): And for the revenue aspects, after the Appropriation Bill is passed, we will submit budget legislation on revenue proposals to LegCo. When they are passed, the procedure is completed.

Reporter (in Chinese): How about the provisional legislature? I think the JLG has reached a consensus.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): The stand of the Hong Kong Government about the provisional legislature is very clear. I don't have to repeat that.

Reporter (in Chinese): After July 1, what will be the scenario? How will you liaise with the Central Government with respect to the Budget for the SAR?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): After July 1, the relationship between the SAR Government and the Central Government has been clearly set out in the Basic Law.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, about the public works spending. There is still under-spending by several billion dollars this year. The Government has hoped to improve the under-spending situation for a few years. Why is it that you still can't improve the situation?

Another question is about resumption of land involving an expenditure increase by three times. Does that include the resumption of land with respect to the West Rail?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): About the under-spending in capital works, I wonder where you get the data saying that it is very serious. Mrs Lam can answer that. The present situation has improved actually.

Mrs Lam (in Chinese): The under-spending in the Capital Works Reserve Fund in the Revised Estimates of 1996-97 is about \$5 billion. But I do not agree that it shows that we have not improved on the under-spending situation or the progress of the works. In the early 90's, in terms of under-spending it was 30% or 35%. In the revised estimates for 1996-97, the under-spending factor, if we discount certain delays involved in land matters, is as low as 6% in terms of our capability to proceed on our works expenditure. This is the best performance since the early 90's, I can say.

Reporter (in Chinese): Does the increased expenditure on resumption of land include the West Rail?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): In terms of resumption of land we do not just look at individual lots and what lots we have to resume in 1997-98. It is not like that. We follow a trend on the approximate amount of land to be resumed. As for the actual areas of land to be resumed, the compensation and the timing, we can only have a clearer picture nearer the time.

Reporter (in Chinese): What is the rental for the Chief Executive's Office in a year? How is it covered?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): I'm afraid I don't have specific figures for the rental for the CE's Office.

Reporter (in Chinese): A follow-up in terms of resumption of land. There has not been major resumption of land in the past few years. You say that you follow the trend in doing your calculations. Does it mean that you exclude the West Rail?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): As I said, it is hard to say whether we include or exclude the West Rail. For example, if there is a need for resumption, say in early 1998, we will proceed in the year of 1997-98. If there is no need for a certain lot, we may have other needs. Resumption of land was not something to be decided specifically when we formulated the budget. We didn't have the number of lots in mind.

Reporter: (in English) There isn't any mention of either the West Rail or the Tseung Kwan O extension in the estimates. Does that mean the projects are on hold?

Mr K C Kwong (in English): With respect to the West Rail and the Tseung Kwan O Railway proposals, the detailed planning work is at present being carried out by the two corporations. Of course there will be a need for some additional resources in government departments like Transport Department, Highways Department, Transport Branch and so on, to take forward the consideration of these proposals. So the planning process is proceeding apace but we have not specifically earmarked funds for the purpose of injecting equity or extending loans to the two corporations. The main reason is the detailed proposals, including the financing package, have yet to be worked out.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, a follow-up on the CE's office expenditure. Apart from staffing and rental covered in two items, during this period when the CE is still the CE (designate), how can you make arrangements so that you can get the refund or reimbursement from the Central Government in future? Do you have additional commitments? What sub-heads reflect that?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, I don't quite get your question. Why is it that we have to chase up the Central Government for money?

Reporter (in Chinese): Well not chase after, you have to seek reimbursement in fact.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): For the CE's office, when there is a need for expenditure, it is now met by the Director of Admin, under the Head for the offices of the CS and the FS. Of course that is for general kind of expenditure. If you talk about expenditure of the staff, it depends on where the staff are seconded from. Perhaps the expenditure will be covered by that particular department for short-term secondment of this kind. As for rentals, it is accounted for under the Government Property Agency. At this point in time I don't see the scenario where it may involve money matters with the Central Government.

Reporter (in Chinese): About other expenditures, under what heads are those expenditures considered?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, if it is general departmental expenditure, it is met by the Director of Administration. For secondment of staff, say the Treasury Department has to second an accountant to the office to look at the systems, then it will be for short term secondment and the person will return to the Treasury Department. The Treasury will pay for the salary of the seconded officer. That is the ordinary arrangement for secondment between Government departments.

Reporter (in Chinese): But for similar questions asked by Mr Cheung Man-kwong for the OOCL staff and other staff seconded to the CE's office. So there are other expenditures. Under what heads are those expenditures included?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Well, for general expenditure, it is under the head controlled by the Director of Administration under the office of CS and FS.

Reporter (in Chinese): In the Draft Estimates 1997-98 for the Government House head, there is a decline of 23%. For the Directorate establishment, there is also a reduction by seven posts. Why?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): In June 96, the establishment of the Political Adviser's office is transferred from the Government Secretariat to Government House. The Political Adviser's office will cease its work on 30 June. So in the Draft Estimate for 97-98, we only reserve the funding for three months. Comparing it with 96-97, there is therefore such a difference.

Reporter (in Chinese): There is a slight increase in additional commitments for the next year. Is there any special items, say for the handover or unexpected items like that?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Additional commitments are to earmark funds for expediter which cannot be precisely identified at this time or unexpected expenditure as you said. For example, the increase in salaries of civil servants and staff of subverted agencies or inflation-linked adjustments. Since those expenditures cannot be forecast correctly, I cannot say what items they are.

Reporter (in Chinese): There is an increase compared to last year.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): If you look at growth in real terms, there isn't an increase.

Reporter (in Chinese): I have two questions, the first on housing. Mr Tung said he was concerned about the housing issue. A large part of the Budget will be within his term of office. Have you discussed with him on housing in relation to the Budget and are the conclusions of your discussions reflected in the Budget?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Concerning housing, if you look at the introduction to estimates, the majority of the expenditure on housing is the expenditure of the Housing Authority. You know that for the government estimates, it has not included a large part of the public expenditure on housing. The second point is that we briefed Mr Tung on the preparation of the Draft Estimates. Mr Tung was elected in about December last year, when by and large we had already decided on our draft estimates of expenditures.

Reporter (in Chinese): Recently, people are concerned about the new immigrants. Has the Administration considered taking care of the new immigrants in this Draft Estimates?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): When you can look at individual heads in our expenditure, you will see that we have increased our expenditure to assist the new immigrants to integrate with our community.

Reporter (in Chinese): What is the percentage share on the whole?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): I don't have the figure at hand.

Reporter (in Chinese): You mentioned the expenditure head of the Director of Administration is under the Government House. We want to know how much is earmarked for the Government House before the transition and how much for the CE after the transition.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): In drafting our Estimates we adopt a 12 months scenario. We do not earmark the expenditure before or after a certain month.

Reporter (in Chinese): In the past few years, to a certain extent the Budget has followed the Governor's Policy Address to implement it. I want to know what is the involvement of the Governor in drafting the Draft Estimates?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): The Governor's involvement in the preparation of this Draft Estimates has not been different from his involvement in the past. Last year, in publishing Governor's Policy Address, we said to you that 97-98 was a unique year. In considering resource allocation, we did not specifically follow the Policy Address.

Reporter (in Chinese): Is the land premium for CT-9 included in the 97-98 land revenue? Secondly, the CE will formally take office on 1 July. Will there be any difference on the expenditure of Government House? Do you follow the established practice or have you talked to Mr Tung and come up with a different budget?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): When we consider the land revenue for 97/98 we have taken into account the land that could possibly be sold but I cannot disclose the details of individual sites. As for the establishment of the CE's office, our assumption is that the establishment of Government House will continue. After 1 July, if there is any need to change the establishment, we will approve it when it is under delegated authority. If it falls outside our delegate authority, we will seek the approval of the Finance Committee.

Reporter (in English): A few clarifications. First of all on the question of the revised land premium figure, almost \$60 billion. I presume this is a record figure. I want to get my facts right.

Mr Cookson (in English): I think we would be presuming as well.

Reporter (in English): The second point is, the booklet talks about a 5.6% increase in recurrent government expenditure. Do you have the figure for the percentage increase for total government expenditure?

Mr Cookson (in English): The total growth figure for government expenditure is 6.4%.

Reporter (in Mandarin): The expenses for the provisional legislature for the time being come from the Central Government. How will you provide for the reimbursement after July 1 within your Budget?

Mr K C Kwong (in Mandarin): The position of the Hong Kong Government with respect to the provisional legislature is very clear. There is no need for me to answer this question.

Reporter (in Chinese): About the land sales, the government has undertaken to provide more land for residential purposes. In the coming year, for land revenue it will be less by half, actually. Can you say something about land sales next year, say how many hectares will be for residential? Next year we don't need any land sales restrictions in terms of discussion between Britain and China. Will you sell more or less land next year?

Mr K C Kwong: The Lands Department and the PEL Branch have a blueprint for the land sales programme for 97/98. We still have to discuss with the Chinese through the Land Commission for the first three months of the year, that is from April to June. Part of the blueprint is still being discussed. It is hard for me to give specific information about what kind of land will be sold or how many hectares will be involved.

Reporter (in Chinese): Mr Kwong, about public housing expenditure, page 7 and page 13 of the booklet say that there is a growth of 9.2% and 16%. Then page 13, Capital Expenditure, it is rising significantly. But you also said that this kind of expenditure does not include most of the expenditure of the HA.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): It does include it.

Reporter (in Chinese): Sorry, it does include it. Now, can you elaborate on that, on the details of the expenditure?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): It is hard for me to answer Housing Authority expenditure on their behalf. It is just like you are asking me about the expenditure of the Urban Council. It is hard for me to speak on their behalf.

Reporter (in Chinese): But it is a growth of 16%. What would be the main area for the increase?

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): I understand it to be the increase in expenditure relating to housing production and maintenance. As for the details, you have to ask the HA.

Reporter (in Chinese): The premium for a few months next year still has to be shared with the Land Fund. What is the share to the Land Fund? In the past, half will go into that account.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): Please refer to Volume 2, CWRP, footnote 2. You can do the calculations. By my very quick calculations, it is about \$11.4 billion.

Reporter (in Chinese): For the head of the LegCo Secretariat, it seems that there is a reduction of 20% in expenditure. In calculating this, have you considered the new round of elections in future with respect to LegCo? Have you considered the relationship between the provisional legislature and the present LegCo? It is in Volume 1B, head 112.

Mr K C Kwong (in Chinese): For your second question, our assumption is that the legislature after July 97 will have a similar mode of operation and funding requirement. This is the basis for formulating the estimates.

DS for Tsy, Mr Kevin Ho (in Chinese): The answer to the first question is straight forward. Some of the staff of LegCo are contract staff. When their contracts expire in 96-97, there is gratuity involved. This will not be repeated in 97/98. So next year's expenditure will be less as a result.

End

Substantial increase in expenditure on basic education

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The Government will continue to invest heavily in improving education in Hong Kong in the 1997-98 financial year. The total expenditure on education is about \$45.315 billion, which represents the largest share (18.2 per cent) of the total public expenditure.

This was revealed by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph W P Wong, this (Thursday) afternoon at a press conference on the 1997/98 draft estimates of expenditure on education and employment.

He noted that the expenditure on education in 1997/98 represented a nominal increase of 15.7 per cent over the revised estimate of this year or 7.7 per cent in real terms. The figure was higher than the 6.9 per cent increase in real terms of the total public expenditure.

Mr Wong pointed out that as the tertiary education has entered a consolidation stage, the increase in expenditure on basic education will be comparatively higher than that of tertiary education. The expenditure on basic education is \$30.669 billion or 67.7 per cent of the total expenditure on education. This represents an increase of 18.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent in nominal and real terms respectively over that of the current year.

He emphasised that improvements would be made in six main areas to enhance the development of basic education at a non-recurrent expenditure of \$3.831 billion and recurrent expenditure of over \$900 million a year. The estimated expenditure for 1997/98 is \$278 million.

The six areas of improvements and new measures are: (1) teaching and learning environment; (2) support services for new arrival children; (3) quality of school education; (4) special education; (5) language proficiency; and (6) civic education.

To improve teaching and learning environment, Mr Wong said the Government will:

- * build nine schools, including six primary and three secondary schools, by the 1999 academic year at a non-recurrent cost of \$488 million and recurrent cost of \$194 million a year; and
- * improve the environment of another 150 schools at a non-recurrent expenditure of \$2.557 billion between 1997 and 2000.

The support services for new arrival children will include:

- * building nine new secondary schools by the 1999 academic year, in addition to five new primary schools to be completed by the end of 1997 academic year, at a non-recurrent cost of \$ 479 million and a recurrent cost of \$298 million a year;
- * provision of school-based support services for some 9,600 new arrival students at a recurrent cost of \$ 21 million; and
- * lower the admission age from 18 to 15 for all adult education courses.

On enhancing quality of school education, Mr Wong said the various measures will include:

- * extension of reduction of class size to Primary 5;
- * provision of further support for implementing Target Oriented Curriculum and School Management Initiative;
- * conversion of an additional 126 uni-sessional/bi-sessional primary schools to whole-day operation between 1997 and 2000;
- * an increase of 95 student guidance teacher (SGT) between 1997 and 1999 to improve the SGT to pupil ratio from 1:2500 to 1:1680;
- * provision of 350 additional graduate teacher posts in primary schools in the 1997 academic year;
- * an increase of textbook allowance to students by 40 per cent;
- * strengthening support services provided for band five students; and
- * provision of an additional Clerical Assistant to each aided primary school with 28 to 35 classes.

Regarding the improvement of special education, the government will implement the priority areas of the recommendations put forward by the Board of Education Sub-committee on Special Education. The recommendations include revision of the provision of school nurses, improvement of the provision of boarding staff, improvement of the provision of boarding staff and provision of a resource centre for special education teachers. The non-recurrent expenditure is \$4 million and the recurrent expenditure is \$32 million a year. Besides, the government will introduce a pilot scheme to promote integration of students with special education needs in mainstream schools at a recurrent cost of \$20 million a year.

To enhance the language proficiency of students, the government will continue to implement the recommendations of the Education Commission Report No. 6. The English and Chinese Extensive Reading Schemes will be extended to all levels of primary and secondary schools at a recurrent cost of \$27 million a year. The government will also increase the provision of intensive English courses to Secondary 6 and 7 students and set up a Language Resources Centre.

As to measures to promote civic education, the provision of grants for introducing the subject, which is currently provided for Secondary 1 to 3 levels, will be extended to all primary levels and Secondary 4 to 7.

Mr Wong noted that the expenditure on tertiary education for 1997/98 is estimated to be \$14.646 billion, representing an increase of 10.6 per cent in nominal terms or three per cent in real terms over the current year.

In view of an increasing number of students applying for grants and loans and increases in academic expenses, the government proposes to raise the total amount of grants and loans provided for students of the Shue Yan College to \$7.4 million and \$16.7 million respectively. The figures represent an increase of \$2.1 million in grants and \$9.5 million in loans as compared with this year's. The average amount of financial assistance to each student applying for grants and loans will be increased to around \$26,000, which represents an increase of about 60 per cent in real terms.

Turning to employment, Mr Wong said about \$1.273 billion will be spent in 1997-98 to maintain and improve employment services and to promote labour relations and safety at work. Of the amount, some \$599 million, a 15 per cent increase in nominal terms and seven per cent increase in real terms, will be allocated to the Labour Department (LD).

The LD's expenditure will cover four main areas: occupational safety and health (about \$ 237 million or 39.7 per cent of LD's total expenditure); employees' rights and benefits (about \$179 million or 29.9 per cent of LD's total expenditure); employment services (\$106 million or 17.7 per cent of LD's total expenditure); and labour relations (\$76 million or 12.7 per cent of LD's total expenditure).

Mr Wong noted that the government will allocate an additional \$35 million to implement new initiatives in the employment area. The initiatives include implementation of the new legislation on occupational safety and health in the non-industrial sectors, enhancement of the jurisdiction of the Minor Employment Claims adjudication Board, and improvement to guidance and employment services for new immigrants.

Resources will also be allocated to the Vocational Training Council to fund its comprehensive vocational training and apprenticeship training.

End

Proposed increases in education expenditure welcomed

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Director of Education, Mrs Helen C P Lai Yu, today (Thursday) welcomed the increase of \$1.1 billion in Government's proposed allocation to the Education Department for recurrent and non-works capital spending in the 1997-98 financial year.

"This is 5.4 per cent over the 1996-97 Revised Estimate and compares with last year's increase of four per cent," Mrs Yu said.

"With this proposed increase, Education Department's budget will be \$21.55 billion.

"We are firmly committed to improving school education. We plan to introduce new initiatives and enhance existing services," she said.

End

Labour Department welcomes increase in proposed expenditure

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In response to media enquiries, the Commissioner for Labour, Miss Jacqueline Willis, today (Thursday) welcomed Government's proposed allocation of \$599.5 million to the Labour Department in the 1997-98 financial year.

Miss Willis said this represented an increase of 15 per cent (\$78.1 million) over the 1996-97 revised estimates of \$521.4 million. In real terms, this was an increase of seven per cent.

She said, with the proposed expenditure, the Labour Department will be able to continue to improve the quality of its existing services and introduce new initiatives to promote the well-being and safety of our workforce.

End

Long-term Prison Sentences Review Bill

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The Governor in Council has endorsed a Bill to further enhance the transparency, efficiency and fairness of the prison sentence review and remission system, a Government spokesman said today (Thursday).

At present, long-term prison sentences, including life sentences and detention at Her Majesty's pleasure, are reviewed, on a regular basis, by the advisory Board of Review, Long Term Prison Sentences.

The spokesman said that the Government proposed to introduce legislation to govern the procedures for the review of these sentences.

"The legislation will establish the existing Board as a statutory body and will give it additional tools to help it in discharging its functions, including the making of conditional release and post-release supervision orders," he said.

Under the proposals, the new Board, called the Long-term Prison Sentences Review Board, will have eight to 11 members, two of whom must be serving or former judges of the Supreme Court. The two judicial members will serve as President and Deputy President of the Board.

"The Board will be empowered to prescribe post-release supervision for prisoners whose indeterminate sentences have been changed to determinate sentences by the Governor on the Board's advice," the spokesman said.

"Post-release supervision for other prisoners serving determinate sentences will remain in the purview of the Post-Release Supervision Board."

A Conditional Release Under Supervision Scheme is also proposed. Under this scheme, the new Board may order certain prisoners to be released conditionally with supervision, whose indeterminate sentences may be changed to determinate sentences upon successful completion of the scheme.

"This scheme will provide an additional tool to the new Board," the spokesman said.

Changes are also proposed to the present system for reviewing cases involving discretionary life sentences and detention at Her Majesty's pleasure.

The spokesman said that under the new arrangements, for existing cases, the Chief Justice would make recommendation for approval by the Governor, on the appropriate minimum term to be served, or the "tariff period".

"For new cases, the trial judge would specify, in open court, the tariff period, which would be part of the sentence.

"The new Board would consider recommending a determinate sentence after the prisoner has served his full tariff period," he said.

Prisoners transferred back to Hong Kong to serve the remainder of their sentences would also be eligible for consideration by the new Board for remission of sentences, the spokesman added.

The Long-term Prison Sentences Review Bill will be gazetted on Friday (March 7). It is expected to be introduced into the Legislative Council on March 19 this year.

End

Registered Designs Bill to protect industrial designs

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A Registered Designs Bill, which aims to establish an independent registered designs system in Hong Kong for the protection of industrial designs in line with international standards, will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday).

A spokesman for the Trade and Industry Branch said: "At present, Hong Kong does not have a separate designs registry. Under the existing provisions of the United Kingdom Designs (Protection) Ordinance, Cap. 44, a design is automatically protected in Hong Kong if it is registered in the United Kingdom.

"A new local registered designs law needs to be enacted before July 1, 1997 because the existing law is dependent on the United Kingdom designs law."

He said: "Agreement was reached by the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group Meeting in November 1995 on the proposals for localising the registered designs law in Hong Kong."

The spokesman said: "Design articles occupy an important place in our economy and cover an extremely wide range of goods, such as domestic appliances, furniture, textiles, fashion, jewellery and watches.

"In many cases, design is the decisive factor in the commercial success of a commercial product. The investment in developing a design can be substantial and the commercial risk can be high. On the other hand, once a design has become a success, it costs only a fraction of the original research and development cost to reproduce it. Design protection is of great importance to Hong Kong and especially to the small and medium enterprises."

He said: "A draft Registered Designs Bill was issued to parties concerned in the industrial, professional and academic fields during a consultation exercise from December 1996 to January 1997. We have as far as possible incorporated the comments received in this Bill.

"Under the Bill, the period of protection of a design registered with the proposed Hong Kong Designs Registry will be for an initial period of five years. Registration may be extended for four periods of five years each upon payment of the prescribed renewal fee. The maximum duration of protection will be 25 years.

"For continuity, designs already registered in the United Kingdom will be deemed as Hong Kong registered designs after the commencement of the new law.

"The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on March 19 in order to ensure that the necessary legislative and administrative system can be put into place before July 1, 1997", he added.

End

Use of Chinese in High Court jury trials

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The Jury (Amendment) Bill 1997, which aims mainly to amend the Jury Ordinance to enable the Judiciary to conduct jury trials in the High Court in Chinese before July 1, 1997, will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday).

The opportunity is also taken to amend the list of those exempted from jury service to include the Legal Adviser of the Legislative Council Secretariat and his legally qualified assistants, and the spouses (instead of just the wives) of the Chief Justice, the Justices of Appeal and judges of the High Court.

A Government spokesman explained today (Thursday) that the Judiciary's objective was to put in place by July 1, 1997 a wholly bilingual court system in which either English or Chinese can be used at all levels of the courts.

Since 1974, lawyers and magistrates have been able to use either of the languages in the magistrates' courts. The Official Languages (Amendment) Ordinance 1995 was also enacted in July 1995 to remove the restrictions on the use of Chinese in the higher courts and certain tribunals.

This was applied to the District Court and the Lands Tribunal in February 1996 and to the High Court (for hearing appeals from magistrates' courts, the Labour Tribunal and the Small Claims Tribunal) in December 1996.

At present proceedings in the High Court, except appeals from the lower courts and tribunals, and the Court of Appeal can still be conducted only in English. The Judiciary proposes to remove these restrictions on a phased basis by July 1, 1997.

"Accordingly, there is a need to amend the Jury Ordinance to change the language requirement for jurors from English to 'the language in which the proceedings are to be conducted', ie English or Chinese," the spokesman said.

End

No licences for sale of new types of cordless phones

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The Governor-in-Council has approved the making of an exemption order to permit the sale and use of new types of cordless telephones and cordless data communications equipment without the need of obtaining a licence.

The previous exemption order only covers existing types of cordless telephones conforming to the CT-0 and the CT-2 standards.

"The new exemption order will allow the sale and use of equipment conforming to the Japanese Personal Handy-Phone System (PHS) and the European Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunications (DECT) technical standards and certain types of cordless telephones conforming to American standards in addition to the existing types of cordless telephones CT-0 and CT-2," said an OFTA's spokesman.

"Although the PHS and DECT technologies may be used for public mobile services called Cordless Access Service (CAS), the new exemption order will cover the use of the equipment for private communications only."

Equipment suppliers and dealers are advised that only equipment that have been type-approved by OFTA may be sold to the public. All approved equipment should bear an identification label designated by OFTA (copy reproduced below). The public should only purchase cordless telephones which have displayed such a label.

Under the Telecommunication Ordinance, it is an offence to possess, use or sell unapproved cordless telephones and upon summary conviction, the person responsible will be liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for 2 years. Use of cordless telephones not approved by OFTA could also cause interference to authorized radio services.

The approved exemption order including the full technical specifications is available at OFTA's library for public inspection or accessible from OFTA's Internet home page (URL address: <http://www.ofta.gov.hk>) or the Bulletin Board Service (tel. no. 2834 0119).

End

Government House gardener's guide to azaleas

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The head gardener of Government House, Miss Kennie Law, and her team of 15 colleagues are still working feverishly making final preparations for the annual Azalea Open Day on Saturday and Sunday (March 8 and 9).

Miss Kennie Law, who looks after more than two hectares of garden at Government House, could not hide her enthusiasm when she talked about the azaleas. "This is the best time of the year to see them as most of the flowers are in their full bloom," she said.

"At Government House, there are fifteen kinds of azaleas in various colours, including purple, white, pink and orange ones. When you visit the garden on Saturday or Sunday, do look for all of them."

Along the visit route on the Open Day, there is a Chinese pavilion in the back garden. "Under the shade of the pavilion are impatiens, New Guinea impatiens and hosta from Holland. The impatiens look like mini pink roses while the New Guinea impatiens are red and purple," Miss Law said.

The most popular spot for photographs is a flight of stairs, also in the back garden.

"Looking up, you will find the stairs leading to the back of Government House. We call this place 'Lau Shui Heung' (running water sound) because there used to be water running down from the planting area. Now we have grown different flowers on both sides of the stairs, including pink azaleas and azaleas simsii."

Up the stairs is a small fountain. In the adjacent gardens there are roses, purple Lantana and camellia. "We have more than 10 kinds of camellia here. The colours range from white, red to pink. Some of them are from Japan," Miss Law said.

The public will also have the chance to see the inside of Government House through the main lobby.

Miss Law has appealed to the public to be careful with the plants as it has taken them about two months to prepare for this annual event.

"Please do not walk on the grass, not to litter and not to pick flowers. Be considerate so that more people can enjoy the flowers," she said.

Government House will be open to the public on Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm.

An extra day, on March 15 (Saturday), has been set aside for wheelchair users, including people with a disability and elderly persons. Admission on this day is by ticket only. All tickets have been distributed and no ticket is available now.

End

Drug prevention seminar for social workers

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The focus of Hong Kong's anti-drug preventive education and publicity programme for this (1997) year will continue to be on young persons despite the drop in the number of young drug abusers reported, the Assistant Secretary for Security (Narcotics), Mr Lam Ka-tai, said today (Thursday).

Mr Lam was addressing the Seminar on "Drug Abuse Prevention Among Youths" attended by more than 150 in-service and student social workers.

Jointly organised by the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) and the Social Welfare Department, the seminar was aimed at keeping social workers abreast of Hong Kong's anti-drug efforts and enhancing their skills in dealing with young drug abusers.

Mr Lam said: "In the first nine months of 1996, there were 3,076 young drug abusers under the age of 21 reported to the Narcotics Division's Central Registry of Drug Abuse, representing a decrease of 7 per cent when compared with the corresponding figure of 1995. This figure represented an even bigger drop of 12.6 per cent when compared with the corresponding figure of 1994.

"The proportion of young people involved in drug abuse remains relatively small, which is around 3.6 per 1,000 of the population aged 11 -20.

"Notwithstanding the drop in the number of young drug abusers, we are not complacent. We believe that the problem of drug abuse should best be tackled at source through preventive education efforts."

Apart from today's seminar for social workers, Mr Lam said the preventive education and publicity programme would include the following components:

- * three new TV Announcement of Public Interest (APIs) to promote an anti-drug culture among young persons ;
- * the use of internet to educate them on the harmful effects of drug abuse;
- * on-going drug education talks for secondary and primary 6 students and parents of secondary students by the Narcotics Division;
- * workshops for in-service and trainee teachers.

Mr Lam said: "One of the three TV APIs specifically aims at educating young people that there is no difference between 'hard' and 'soft' drugs in terms of its harmful effects to drug abusers."

Mr Lam went on to explain the role of Narcotics Division in the preventive education and publicity programme and Government resources available to social workers for drug abuse prevention work.

Other topics examined at today's seminar were social workers' role in drug abuse prevention among youths, drug education in schools, treatment of young drug abusers in substance abuse clinics and therapeutic group work in drug abuse prevention.

Also speaking at the seminar were the Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth and Rehabilitation) Mr Carlos Leung; the Consultant Psychiatrist of Castle Peak Hospital, Dr Leung Shung-pun; the Principal Inspector (Biological Sciences) of the Education Department, Mr Ho Chung-nin; and the Service Development Officer of the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers, Mr Lee King-fai; and Social Work Officer of Against Substance Abuse Scheme of the Social Welfare Department, Mr Tan Tick-ye.

End

Immigration Officers to be attached to UK Immigration

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Four immigration officers will leave for the United Kingdom in the middle of March for a five-week attachment programme with the United Kingdom Immigration Service.

The four officers are Acting Senior Immigration Officers Mrs Sharon Lai Kwok Sau-han, Messrs Choi Wai-lun and William Lee Hok-lim and Acting Immigration Officer Mr Cheung Hon-ping. They will visit branches of the Home Office handling immigration and nationality matters as well as immigration offices and ports.

At a briefing before their departure, the Director of Immigration Mrs Regina Ip pointed out that the Immigration Department placed great importance on giving its staff professional training.

She also said that due to the growing complexity of immigration work, members of the Service needed to be vigilant and alert. Mrs Ip said she hoped the attachment would provide a good opportunity for the officers to broaden their horizon and to have a better understanding of the work of their counterparts in the United Kingdom.

End

New video to introduce household waste separation

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The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has recently produced a promotional video aiming to encourage public participation in source separation and recovery of household waste.

Entitled "Green Families", the 20-minute video is presented in a drama format. It introduces in an entertaining way the basic ingredients for organising and implementing campaigns on waste separation at source.

"Source recovery and separation of waste is an effective means to facilitate recovery and recycling, thus reducing the quantity of waste requiring final disposal at the scarce landfills," said EPD Assistant Director (Waste Facilities), Mr Benny Wong.

He said that various government departments were actively examining complementary measures on waste reduction. These measures when finalised will form part of the Government's Waste Reduction Plan, which is expected to be put out for public consultation shortly.

"However, the success of waste reduction requires the full support from all sectors of the community," he added.

Mutual Aid Committees and residents associations of public housing estates can obtain copies of the new video and information packs on source separation of household waste through the management office of respective estates.

Owners' corporations, private housing tenants' associations and other organisations interested in obtaining the waste reduction video package can contact EPD's Facilities Planning Group at 2835 1089.

Information materials on waste reduction are available at the Environmental Resources Centre in Wan Chai and all public libraries of the Urban Council and Regional Council. People can also use the EPD Recycling Hotline 2755 2750 to obtain further information.

End

Commissioner of ICAC takes salute at CSD's passing-out parade

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Commissioner of the Independent Commission Against Corruption, Mr Michael Leung Man-kin, will take the salute at the passing-out parade of the Correctional Services Department tomorrow (Friday) afternoon at the CSD Staff Training Institute.

Graduating are 86 Assistant Officers II who have just completed a 23-week basic training course.

The parade will feature the marching team of the Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution and the marching band of the Cape Collinson Correctional Institution.

End

Post Office recorded delivery service launched

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The Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman, officiated at the launching ceremony of the Recorded Delivery service today (Thursday).

Mr Cheung Siu Hung, member of the Post Office Customer Liaison Group, demonstrated the new service.

Mr Footman said: "The Recorded Delivery service provides proof of posting and proof of delivery.

"The service is similar to our registered letter service, but provides no compensation in the event of loss or damage.

"At \$11, compared with \$13 for registered mail, it is an economical way to send important documents with little monetary value, which require proof of posting or delivery.

"The Post Office mission is to anticipate and meet changing needs, and to achieve high level of customer satisfaction," said Mr Footman.

"The introduction of Recorded Delivery service to the public is part of our continuous effort to upgrade our services and to satisfy customer needs."

The new service is available from March 7 for local letters and printed papers.

End