



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Statement by the Governor

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The following statement is issued by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten:

I very much welcome the Canadian Government's announcement this (Thursday) morning that they will grant visa free access to holders of Hong Kong SAR passports. This is good news for Hong Kong, and another welcome sign of Canada's close friendship with Hong Kong and understanding of the integrity of our passport issuing system. I hope that the Canadian Government's decision will encourage other states that have not yet made their decision on visa free access to follow Canada's example. I would also hope that states where visa free access is not available will continue to treat holders of Hong Kong issued passports favourably, in recognition of the good reputation of Hong Kong travellers and Hong Kong passports.

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Transcript of Chief Secretary's media session

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Following is the transcript of the remarks made by the Chief Secretary, Mrs Anson Chan, at a media session after attending a public function at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel this (Thursday) afternoon:

Question: How do you see the possibility that you think Thailand will also grant visa-free access to Hong Kong residents?

Chief Secretary: I certainly hope that when I visit Bangkok next week and I meet the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, I will certainly raise this matter with both these gentlemen. We will continue our lobbying efforts. As you know the Director of Immigration, the Secretary for Security and other senior officials always raise this issue with senior officials that they meet in other countries, and on my previous visits to other countries, I also raised this issue.

Question: Would you repeat in English the response.....?

Chief Secretary: I was asked whether there is a conflict of interest in Mr C Y Leung heading this working group. I am sure the question of conflict of interest is a matter that the Chief Executive (designate) will be very concerned about. I understand that he is going to explain how this working group, the membership, how they are going to go about their work tomorrow when he holds his press conference. I am sure he will be very happy to address this particular problem.

End

Board of Directors for HK Mortgage Corporation appointed

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The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (Thursday) that the Financial Secretary has appointed the Directors of the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited (HKMC). The composition of the Board is as follows :-

Mr Donald Y K Tsang
Financial Secretary
(Chairman)

Mr Joseph C K Yam
Chief Executive,
Hong Kong Monetary Authority
(Deputy Chairman)

Mr Ronald J Arculli

Mr Alex M C Au

Mr Eddy C Fong

Mr Tom Y Hsiao

Dr Huang Chen-ya

Mr Edwin C K Lau

Mr David K P Li

Mr Ngan Kam-chuen

Ms Anna H Y Wu

Mr Rafael S Y Hui
Secretary for Financial
Services

Mr Dominic S W Wong
Secretary for Housing

Mr Andrew L T Sheng
Deputy Chief Executive,
Hong Kong Monetary Authority

Mr Norman T L Chan
Deputy Chief Executive,
Hong Kong Monetary Authority

Commenting on the composition of the Board of Directors, the Financial Secretary, Mr Donald Tsang said, "The 15-member Board has a balanced representation with its Directors drawn from different sectors of the community. I look forward to working closely with the Directors to develop, guide and oversee the management of the HKMC so that it will operate prudently and profitably. The successful operation of the HKMC will over time contribute to banking and monetary stability, debt market development and home financing in Hong Kong."

Mr Joseph Yam, Chief Executive of the HKMA, said, "I am delighted to be appointed as Deputy Chairman of the HKMC. With the Directors now in place, the Corporation can now move full steam ahead to prepare for the commencement of business. We expect the HKMC will be able to start purchasing mortgage loans from authorized institutions and issuing debt securities in the fourth quarter of 1997."

The Directors of the HKMC are appointed by the Financial Secretary on a personal basis. The term of appointment of the current Directors, which commenced on March 19, 1997, will run until the annual general meeting of the HKMC to be held around March 1998. The first Board meeting is scheduled to be held at the end of March.

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More Government spending to assist new arrivals

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The Government will allocate \$178.47 million in the next financial year for the provision of services for new arrivals from China, representing an increase of more than 160 per cent over this financial year, the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Shelley Lau, said today (Thursday).

Speaking at a post-Budget press conference on the draft expenditure of Home Affairs Department (HAD) for 1997/98, Mrs Lau said that to help new arrivals integrate into the local community as quickly and as smoothly as possible, HAD had been tasked with monitoring and assessing services for new arrivals since October 1995.

A Steering Committee, chaired by the Director of Home Affairs and attended by representatives of relevant policy branches, departments and non-governmental organisations, has also been established to enhance services for the newcomers in a co-ordinated manner.

Outlining the breakdown of the draft expenditure for new arrivals, Mrs Lau said HAD would be allocated \$5.28 million for additional staff to help monitor and assess the services provided to new arrivals, as well as to conduct surveys on new arrivals and assist in the production of the service handbook.

Meanwhile, the Education Department will spend about \$168 million to provide more classes and services for new immigrant students. This represents an increase of more than 150 per cent over this year's expenditure.

The Labour Department will also set aside \$1.66 million to strengthen employment and career retraining services for new arrivals.

The Social Welfare Department will earmark \$3.53 million to subsidise the International Social Service (ISS) for providing post-migration services for new arrivals. This shows an increase of 36 per cent as compared with that of this year.

Prior to the press conference, Mrs Lau visited a Cantonese class organised by the ISS Hong Kong Branch for new arrivals.

She distributed to the participants the latest edition of a handbook outlining a range of services for them offered by the Government and non-governmental organisations. She also gave them a Budget pamphlet to help them get a basic idea of Hong Kong Government's tax system and how public money will be spent.

"This is one of my regular visits to centres offering services for new arrivals. It is useful in understanding the feelings and needs of new arrivals, and in gathering views from non-governmental organisations and Government departments in the provision of services for new arrivals," Mrs Lau said.

"We will continue to review whether and what improvements can be made to existing services," she stressed.

End

Regulations to enhance consumer protection

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Two regulations on consumer goods and children's products, which seek to further enhance consumer protection, will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday).

A Government spokesman said today (Thursday) that the Consumer Goods Safety Regulation and the Toys and Children's Products Safety Regulation will be tabled at the Legislative Council on April 9.

The two Regulations require all consumer goods covered by the Consumer Goods Safety Ordinance and toys and children's products covered under the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance to have all safety markings or labels in both English and Chinese (bilingual safety labelling requirement).

Additionally, all toys and children's products covered under the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance will have to carry the name, trade or other identification mark and the local address of the manufacturer, importer or supplier of the product (identification marking requirement) in English or Chinese or both.

The spokesman said: "We recognise that safety labels in a language widely understood by the community - Chinese - is of paramount importance to ensure consumer safety.

"We also see the need to ensure that the English-speaking community in Hong Kong, including some 160,000 foreign domestic helpers, understand the safety labels on consumer goods, toys and children's products."

He noted: "At present, there is no statutory requirement that safety markings or labels must be provided in English or Chinese."

The spokesman explained: "The bilingual safety labelling requirement will be confined to markings or labels relating to warning or caution phrases given for the safe keeping, use, consumption or disposal of the products.

"By doing so, we aim to strike a balance between enhancing consumer safety and avoiding imposing an undue burden on manufacturers, importers and suppliers.

"The identification marking requirement enables the Commissioner of Customs and Excise to easily identify the source of supply of an unsafe toy or children's product for necessary enforcement action under the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance.

"In order to allow the trade and industry sectors sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments to their products, we will bring the requirements into force 12 months after the enactment of the Regulations," the spokesman added.

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White Paper on Annual Report on HK 1996 to Parliament

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The Annual Report on Hong Kong 1996 to Parliament (Annual Report) has been presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Government today (Thursday).

As in past years, the Annual Report has been published in the form of a White Paper both in London and Hong Kong. It will be tabled at the Legislative Council on April 9.

A Government spokesman said that Her Majesty's Government had agreed in 1985, during the Parliamentary debates on the Hong Kong Bill, to produce annual reports on Hong Kong and to lay them before Parliament.

The purpose of this series of reports is to keep Parliament informed of developments in Hong Kong on a regular basis.

The 1996 Annual Report is the 12th such report and the last in this format before the transfer of sovereignty to China. This Report, however, will not be the last report to Parliament on Hong Kong. The British Government has undertaken to report to Parliament on Hong Kong at six-monthly intervals, starting with a report for the period January-June 1997. These reports will focus on the work of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group, covering the implementation of the Joint Declaration, with special reference to the protection of human rights in Hong Kong. The British Foreign Secretary has also promised that these six-monthly reports will continue at least as long as the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group exists, that is until January 1, 2000.

The 1996 Annual Report contains a survey of major events in Hong Kong during 1996. Topics covered include visits to Hong Kong by Government Ministers and overseas visits by the Governor and the Chief Secretary of Hong Kong.

They also include constitutional development, contacts between Hong Kong and China, human rights, Vietnamese migrants, emigration and nationality, infrastructure, general economic and social conditions, law and order, legal and judicial systems and civil service.

Copies of the Annual Report and the Chinese translation will be available, free of charge, to members of the public from tomorrow (Friday).

They can be obtained from all District Offices, the Government Publications Centre (Ground Floor, Low Block, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong) and the Marketing Section of the Information Services Department (17th Floor, Siu On Centre, 188 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong).

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Employers & employees have shared responsibility over safety

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Safety laws do not have much meaning unless both the employer and the employee sides recognise a shared responsibility, the Deputy Commissioner for Labour (Occupational Safety and Health), Mr Lee Kai-fat, said today (Thursday).

Speaking at the signing ceremony of Occupational Safety Charter of Wellcome Company, Mr Lee said this was the only way to bring about improvements to work place conditions, from which we could all benefit.

"The Charter itself is not a legal document. It conveys, however, a very important message: if we are to promote work safety, employers and employees must join hands and work together.

"Employees are entitled to operate in a safe and healthy working environment, and employers should see it as a responsibility to provide the same to their employees. It is only through a spirit of co-operation that we can create a safety culture and benefit for a shared responsibility," Mr Lee said.

He said a proposed Occupational Safety and Health Bill was being examined by the Legislative Council's Bills Committee and he was confident that it would be endorsed in the early part this year.

"We will be producing guidance materials for different major trades on how to comply with the new law. We would clearly take account of the operating business environment of Hong Kong and the practical needs of the workers in relation to their risk exposure and accident records.

"The proposed legislation will net in almost all non-industrial establishments including retail businesses like supermarket chain.

"This means employers of the non-industrial establishments will soon have a general duty under the new law to provide a safe and healthy working condition, and employees too must cooperate with their employers by following safety and health instructions, receiving training, putting on personal protective equipment and taking good care of themselves as well as their fellow workers," he said.

In our view, Mr Lee said, subscribing to the Occupational Safety Charter was a positive way to support the new legislation and the spirit behind it.

End

Arts education vital to personal development: SBCS

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The community has become increasingly aware of the importance of the arts in education and there is now growing recognition that the arts helps to enhance one's imagination, creativity and sensibility, the Secretary for Broadcasting, Culture and Sport, Mr Chau Tak-hay, said today (Thursday).

"And these are qualities vital to a person's upbringing and intellectual development," he added.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of "The Arts and Education in Hong Kong: An International Symposium", Mr Chau said the Government promoted the arts through providing financial support, education and publicity and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council had been an instrumental partner in these activities.

Apart from a seeding grant of \$130 million in 1994 when the Council was established, the Government provides the Council with an annual subvention which amounts to \$82 million for the financial year 1997/98, a 47 percent increase over that of last year.

An Arts and Sports Development Fund was also set up recently with a capital of \$300 million to enable, among other things, the Council's Arts Education Committee and Arts Education Working Group to formulate work plans to promote arts education in schools.

"In the light of these development, today's Symposium is a timely event which can sharpen our focus on ways and measures to foster even greater recognition and acceptance of the important role of the arts both in schools and in the community," he stressed.

End

Value of manufacturers' orders-on-hand in January 1997

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The value of manufacturers' orders-on-hand for local production in January 1997 decreased by 7% over a year earlier, according to the provisional results of a monthly survey released today (Thursday) by the Census and Statistics Department.

Comparing January 1997 with January 1996, the value of orders of the fabricated metal products industry increased by 10%.

On the other hand, decreases in the value of orders were recorded in the plastic products industry (-21%), the electronic products industry (-11%), the textiles industry (-9%), the wearing apparel industry (-5%), the electrical products industry (-2%) and the printing and publishing industry (-1%).

Compared with December 1996, and bearing in mind that this comparison may be affected by seasonal factors, the value of manufacturers' orders-on-hand in January 1997 increased by 6%.

The Monthly Survey of Orders-on-hand covers a sample of some 300 manufacturing firms engaging 50 or more workers.

Manufacturers' orders-on-hand refer to orders and parts of orders received earlier by manufacturers for local production which remain unfilled as at the end of the reference month. Orders received by traders not engaged in production are included if such orders are further placed to manufacturers for production locally. However, orders placed to manufacturing firms for production in China and other places outside Hong Kong are not included in this series of orders-on-hand statistics.

A spokesman of the Department pointed out that caution should be exercised in interpreting the manufacturers' orders-on-hand figures in a single month. Instead, the trend movement of the series as displayed over a wider span of time points should be looked at.

The survey report for January 1997, at \$6 a copy, is now available for sale at the Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, Low Block, Ground Floor, Queensway, and at the Census and Statistics Department Publications Unit, 19th Floor, Wanchai Tower, 12 Harbour Road, Wan Chai.

Enquiries about the survey results may be made to the Industrial Production Statistics Section of the Census and Statistics Department on 2805 6441.

The following table shows the year-on-year percentage changes in the value of orders-on-hand in different manufacturing industries.

Percentage changes in the value of
orders-on-hand in

	December 1996 over December 1995 (Revised)	January 1997 over January 1996 (Provisional)
All industries covered in the survey	-7	-7
* Wearing apparel	-1	-5
* Textiles	-1	-9
* Electronic products	-15	-11
* Electrical products	+3	-2
* Fabricated metal products	+17	+10
* Plastic products	-12	-21
* Printing and publishing	-16	-1

End

Report on Metro mid-term review hearing published

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The Broadcasting Authority has published a report on the public hearing for the mid-term review of the licence of Metro Broadcasting Corporation Limited.

The hearing was held last December to gather public opinion on the performance of the licensee as a reference to evaluate its performance during the licenced period.

It also served to provide a public forum where the licensee could explain, and be questioned as to their past performance and future plans.

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British Forces still a power at Sevens

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On hand to assist with this year's Rugby World Cup Sevens will be up to 400 soldiers from 1st Battalion The Black Watch who have been tasked with stewarding the Hong Kong Stadium throughout the three-day extravaganza.

Members of the Battalion's Pipes and Drums will also provide a suitably stirring musical accompaniment at the Opening Ceremony while the Band of the Royal Marines, enjoying a short tour of the territory, will put on two performances on Finals' Day.

Because of their commitment to the tournament, the weekly Changing of the Guard ceremony, at Prince of Wales Barracks, will not take place on Friday, March 21. The ceremony will resume on Good Friday, March 28.

End