



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

ISSUED BY GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES
BEACONSFIELD HOUSE, HONG KONG. TEL.: 2842 8777

Monday, March 4, 1996

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
Press conference by Prime Minister	1
ExCo welcomes visa-free assurance by Prime Minister	12
Visa-free status will help boost confidence	12
Government committed to promoting human rights	13
New members of housing strategy review group appointed	17
Government House gardens open to public	18
New interest rate on tax reserve certificate authorised	19
Magistrate's resignation announced	20
Hung Hom road links contract signed	20
Over 9,000 agreements lodged with Land Registry in February	22
Sponsor for 1997 Lunar New Year fireworks display sought	22
Central allocation of primary one places	23
Special stamps on 1996 Olympic Games to be issued	24
New maternal and child health centre open	26
Water storage figure	26
Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations	27

Press conference by Prime Minister

* * * * *

Following is a transcript of a press conference given by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major, today (Monday):

Governor: Good afternoon and welcome, as David Frost would say. The Prime Minister will make a few remarks and then questions. If you could as ever declare your identity and which great organ you represent it would be helpful. And time is a bit limited because some of you - us - including the Prime Minister - have somewhere else to go this evening. That is Korea.

Prime Minister: Well Chris, thank you very much. I don't propose to say a great deal at the outset of this press conference. I have had opportunities elsewhere on this visit to say what I had to say, most noticeably at lunch-time and I dare say most of you have had the opportunity of seeing that before deciding what questions to ask this afternoon.

Let me just simply say how much I have enjoyed this particular visit to Hong Kong. It is over four years since last I was here. The speed of change here never ceases to amaze me but I am delighted to have been here again and on this occasion have enjoyed the visit as much as I always do.

We've had a very lively debate on one or two issues over the last couple of days - I enjoyed my meetings with ExCo and LegCo this morning - and I just want to say one or two general things about the present circumstance and the future.

The first thing I would like to say is just to add to a point I know that the Governor has made on many occasions in the past and that is just to express my admiration for the way in which the civil service has coped with matters here in Hong Kong over the last few years. I think Hong Kong are extremely lucky in the quality of their civil service, in the apolitical nature of their civil service, and I think that is something that is well understood here and well appreciated, also, in London.

Let me say a word or two about the natural fears that I think many people may have about the transition. There are some very important issues that I know are of concern to people, still, in Hong Kong. The question of the future of LegCo, whether the through-train arrives at its destination or whether there is a stop in 1997. The question of the Bill of Rights. Both of those I touched upon earlier and on earlier occasions but they may well come up again this afternoon.

When people worry, perhaps, about those problems, I wonder if I might just remind everybody of the problems in the past that seemed insoluble and yet now are behind us. They've been solved. The Court of Final Appeal, airport contracts, a range of other things in the past that were a matter of huge concern at the time but where satisfactory solutions were in the end actually found.

We are going to have to be both persistent and persuasive in our negotiations with China on the problems that remain. We will be so in private and we will express wherever it seems to be of advantage to Hong Kong for us to do so, we will express our views on those matters in public as well.

What I do want to reiterate as an assurance to Hong Kong is that Britain's commitment to Hong Kong and its future is not something that is dribbling away with the 450 or so days that remain. There is a commitment that is very deep, very long standing, and although the legal position may change in June 1997, the practical commitment will not change, the moral imperative will not change, and Britain's interest in Hong Kong, affection for Hong Kong, and trade and commercial relationships with Hong Kong will continue in the future as they have done in the past.

On the occasions I have been able to speak publicly on this trip I have tried to set out - most obviously in the speech at lunch-time today - some reassurance on five points. I will just remind you of them without going through them at any length, I think, again.

Firstly, our long term commitment to Hong Kong both moral and economic.

Secondly, our pledge to pursue every avenue that is open to us if there is to be a breach of the Joint Declaration, including using Britain's influence with the international community to ensure that agreements that were signed are the agreements that are met.

Thirdly, the announcement I made earlier today about visa-free access.

Fourthly, the extra guarantee to the ethnic minorities, the relatively small number of people of Indian and Pakistani ethnic extraction, who fear particular difficulties after 1997.

And fifthly, the commitment I was able to make today to effectively ensure British citizenship for war widows and wives.

Those were the five principal points I have made during this trip.

The next 400-500 days are self-evidently going to be a testing time for Hong Kong. Hong Kong has shown its courage and its persistence on many occasions in the past. It will need to do so again over the next 500 days or so. I've no doubt that it will do so. And neither do I have any doubt, if he will permit me to say so, that in the Governor, Hong Kong could not have a better representative of Hong Kong's views both with London and with China and with other countries. So I think you will remain in very good hands and the Governor will continue to have the direct and immediate access to London that he has always enjoyed.

I think those are the only preliminary points I wish to make. Let us now see if we can field some of your questions. I will let the Governor, by far the highest quality - if my present Press Officer will forgive me - by far the highest quality press officer I've ever had, to select the questioners because he will know them rather better than I do, with the exception of a small present minority.

Question (Chris Yeung, SCMP): Prime Minister, you just spoke firmly and clearly (about) the British commitment to Hong Kong but can you also be equally firm and clear that in the UK Government's will, the Chinese plan to set up a provisional legislature and dilute the Bill of Rights is a breach of the Joint Declaration?

Prime Minister: Well, I touched upon those points earlier and I reiterate them again today. I don't have any doubt at all in my mind that it would be a very grave mistake were LegCo not to proceed right to the end of their natural elected life. I don't think we could, or would, understand if LegCo's life were cut in half in 1997. And neither do I believe the world at large would understand that. There is now an elective democracy in Hong Kong. The present LegCo were elected with a very substantial popular vote. They were elected to do a particular job and I believe they should be permitted to see that job through to its conclusion. Those points have long been put privately to the Chinese leaders. I have made the point entirely publicly. We will do all we can to persuade China that that is the right way to proceed, both in China's interest, for the world would not understand anything else were it to happen in 1997, and also in the interest of people in Hong Kong.

There are of course allied matters on human rights and on the Bill of Rights and I won't reiterate what I said at lunch-time. I think it's probably quite clear.

Question (Sally Blyth, Eastern Express): Mr Major, the guarantees which you gave today to the ethnic minorities, do they actually differ from earlier guarantees which were given by Sir Geoffrey Howe during Parliamentary debates, about ten years ago I think, when he said that the British Government would look favourably upon any application by any of the ethnic minorities here, so that they could enter Britain and the British Government would look favourably upon that? How does the guarantee today differ from that?

Prime Minister: The guarantee today is more specific and a good deal harder. What was said in the past that we would look favourably upon those applications. That doesn't necessarily mean in given circumstances that that would be granted in any sense. What I'm saying today is that where those people have a well founded fear that it is necessary for them to leave Hong Kong, we won't just look favourably upon their application. What I have offered them in those circumstances is a cast iron guarantee that they will be able to come to the United Kingdom. So it is - - -

Question (Sally Blyth, Eastern Express): Well why not just offer them British passports then?

Prime Minister: So it is a good deal firmer than anything we have seen in the past. I am not in the position to go further than that.

Question (S F Yeo, HK Economic Times): We just heard that we will have visa-free for the SAR passport holders and at present, officially, the British passport holder, I mean the Hong Kong ones, will not need to have a visa to land in Britain, but your Government and the immigration authorities in Hong Kong advise people of Hong Kong to take a visa first. So will you apply the same sort of policy towards the SAR passport?

Prime Minister: Well, in future people with an SAR passport certainly will not need a visa when they are coming to United Kingdom. That's not a short-term position, that's the position that I announced today. That wasn't the position before today. It is the position after today. I think it will make a material difference, a beneficial difference to many people who visit the United Kingdom from Hong Kong. Nobody should sniff around and try and find something in the undergrowth that isn't as it appears on the surface. What I said this morning should be taken at its face value. Visas will not be required by holders of an SAR passport visiting the United Kingdom.

Question (S F Yeo, HK Economic Times): How about the BN(O) holders?

Governor: One at a time.

Question (Stanley Ma, HK Metro News): There are many persons

Governor: what about Francis Moriarty?

Question (Stanley Ma, HK Metro News): There have been many persons and organisations in Hong Kong

Speaker (?): It is Francis pretending....

Question (Stanley Ma, HK Metro News): I thought you were asking me.

Governor: Are you Francis Moriarty? Go ahead, carry on.

Question (Stanley Ma, HK Metro News): There are many persons and organisations in Hong Kong who are currently promoting democratic movement of China. You have made promises to give minorities entry into UK after 1997, what about that honourable groups after 1997, because they have ample opportunities to be suppressed by the Chinese Government?

Prime Minister: Well I think if you look at the commitments we've got in the Basic Law and the Joint Declaration, I know people are concerned. I understand the concern that people will have over the changes that are to come. If I may say so, although we have had differences with China from time to time over the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, they have in essence been differences of interpretation over what was meant by the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law and I think it is wise to understand that it has been differences of interpretation not what both sides could clearly see was a breach of the Joint Declaration that had been the points at issue.

I understand the concerns that people fear about persecution. I have to say I think those fears are greatly overdone. Where we have seen a potential risk we have acted.

What I would say more generally on the subject is simply this, those sort of fears sometimes arise because people have the impression that after 1997, in some curious way, Hong Kong is going to be entirely on its own. But if there is an open city anywhere in the world upon whom the eyes of the world are constantly fixed, if there is a more open city than Hong Kong, I cannot myself imagine where that city might be. This is the gateway to the whole of Asia. The trade, commercial gateway for the whole of Asia. It is very much in the interests of Hong Kong that it remains that way but more relevantly from the point of view of your question, it is very much in the interests of China that it remains that way and I think people often imagine that the sheer impact of the world looking at Hong Kong and the sheer impact of the nature of Hong Kong is not going to have any effect upon the future after the end of June, 1997. I do not myself believe that and I think the fears that you raise are unfounded.

Governor: The real Francis Moriarty.

Prime Minister: Are you sure? Can you guarantee that?

Governor: We'll find out from the question I'll tell you.

Question (Francis Moriarty, RTHK): Prime Minister, a subject not on your list of five. You say Hong Kong is not alone but when Mr Rifkind was here - - -

Prime Minister: Can you get closer to a mouthpiece?

Question (Francis Moriarty, RTHK): Sorry, perhaps I'll stand up, you can hear that microphone better.

You say Hong Kong is not alone but when Mr Rifkind was here he suggested that when it came to solving the Boat People question, it was a Hong Kong question. Now if I can just for a moment go back to your last press conference in Hong Kong in 1991, at which you said: "we are discussing regularly, we, I mean the British Government and the Hong Kong Government". You go on several times to talk about we and us. So the question is, where, when it comes to the Vietnamese Boat People does the British responsibility end and the Hong Kong responsibility begin?

Prime Minister: You're quite right, it's the real Francis Moriarty.

Let me tell you exactly what's happening. When I was in Bangkok last week I saw the Vietnamese Prime Minister to discuss the specific problem of the Vietnamese Boat People. If I can take a little bit of history to that, it was very soon after my visit in 1991, that activity on the Boat People began to accelerate. There was clearly a need for decisions to be taken, I agreed with that, the Governor agreed with that. Progress began to be made. Progress was preceding very satisfactorily with volunteers, non-refugees returning back to Vietnam until there was, what I think I might delphically call an external intercession from across the water, and I do not mean by that the United Kingdom.

I spoke to the Vietnamese Prime Minister to see how we can accelerate this process. The objective would be to deal with the problem entirely before the end of June 1997. That is the objective. Satisfying that objective is not wholly in British hands but that is the objective that I seek. With that in mind I agreed with the Vietnamese Prime Minister that I would send British officials immediately from London to Vietnam to discuss how we might re-accelerate this programme. The reason I am sending officials first is that I shall be sending a Minister, a Foreign Office Minister, to Vietnam in April and I want the preliminary ground-clearing work done in advance of that so that we may deal compassionately, sensitively, but speedily and comprehensively with the problem of the non-refugees who are still here in Hong Kong in camps.

So I do see a role for the British Government. We played a role before. I see a role for the British Government, the Hong Kong Government, and the Vietnamese Government. I do not see quite such a role for individuals elsewhere. But for those three groups I do see a role and we are acting to see if we can get this programme moving again satisfactorily.

Question (Mike Brunson): Prime Minister, in your speech you mentioned in passing that if necessary, you would be prepared to take legal action if China is in breach of the Joint Declaration. Will you underline that again? But on the other hand do you not think that that is likely to anger Beijing as much as it might reassure those people here?

Prime Minister: We are not in the business of angering anyone. We have had significant discussions and negotiations with the Chinese and that will continue to be the position. We are not in the business of angering anyone but neither are we in the business of not making clear what the options are in certain circumstances. And I think it is right that everybody should know what the options are that might conceivably be pursued by the British Government 'were it necessary to do so'. And I stress that last point 'were it necessary to do so'.

And what we have said is that if there were breaches of the Joint Declaration, we would have - we the British Government - would have a duty to pursue every legal and other avenue available to us. And what I reaffirmed at lunch-time today is that that is precisely what we would do. We would pursue every legal and other avenue open to us. And I hope that will be a clear reassurance to people who fear that there can, with impunity, be a breach of the Joint Declaration with no response.

Question (Carrie Tan, Oriental Daily): Does that mean that you are going to sue China in the International Court if China is going to dismantle LegCo?

Prime Minister: I have set out precisely what I meant. I am not going to put further flesh on it. What I said was perfectly clear. We will pursue every legal and other avenue available to us. But I am not going to sit down and set out in each and individual circumstance precisely how we would deal with it. I don't think that would be productive and what I wish to do is to try and ensure that the circumstance doesn't arise in the first place. By a circumstance I mean a breach of the Joint Declaration. But those options are open to us should we need them.

Question (Don Macintyre): Prime Minister, can I just return to the ethnic minority question for a moment. Who will decide whether these people are under pressure to leave Hong Kong? I mean will the burden of the proof be as it were on the individual as in asylum cases?

Prime Minister: I considered whether we should actually set down a specific series of circumstances that would be met. We could do that and we will consider, in the period between now and June 1997, whether that might be an appropriate way to deal with the problem.

At this moment, Don, I am not convinced that it is. There are many alternative scenarios that may arise. One thing is certain, these people that we are talking about will not wish to leave Hong Kong of their own volition unless it is absolutely necessary for them to do so. They have their lives here, their businesses here, their interests here, their families here. Every indication we have is that they will wish to stay in Hong Kong if they possibly can.

But if circumstances arise where it is inappropriate for them to remain in Hong Kong, I think that will be apparent. It is a little like designing an elephant - you're not quite sure where to start the design but, by golly, you know when you see it. And I think it is probably wise to leave it upon that basis because that gives the greatest degree of flexibility which I would anticipate we would exercise benevolently if there were risk, to deal with the relatively small number of people who may face this problem. But we could, as I say, identify specific sets of circumstances where we would act. But without further discussion and consideration I am not convinced that would particularly be in the interests of the people concerned.

Question (Washington Post): I am wondering, do you think there is something that China could be doing right now to help calm some of the anxieties? For example, talking to the elected Democratic Party officials or talking to the Governor here.

Prime Minister: I think that would be very helpful, yes. I think they could and I very much hope that they will. If I may return to the point I made earlier. Over the last two or three years many issues that looked as though they were going to provoke huge dissent and may be unbrokerable between Britain, Hong Kong and China, have now been solved. So I think we may well be able to solve some of those matters that so much concern people at present. But yes, self-evidently it would help if there were a dialogue with LegCo and a further and more comprehensive dialogue with the Governor and I would hope there will be such a dialogue.

Question: How much have you raised in the past few days for your Party, in Hong Kong? Free?

Prime Minister: Not what I came here for. Not what I have done. I didn't come here for that purpose, I haven't discussed that purpose. It has not been on my agenda. It has neither crossed my mind nor has it crossed my lips. The answer is that was not why I was here. Is that clear enough?

Governor: But the bet that Martin Lee and the Legislative Council had with Malcolm Rifkind --

Prime Minister: That has been paid.

Governor: -- that Britain would not do anything about visa-free access, has been handed over.

Prime Minister: The Governor is holding that and I will take it back to the Foreign Secretary who is a Scot, has won his bet and will receive his winnings.

Question (Robin Oakley): Prime Minister, how would you respond to critics at home in Britain in your own Party, some perhaps in your own Cabinet, who are suggesting that the visa-free access for SAR passport holders could be abused by potential political asylum-seekers?

Prime Minister: I don't believe it would have been honourable for us not to act as we have and I know no one in my Cabinet who is going to dissent with that view because my Cabinet has approved that view.

Question (Apple Daily): Prime Minister, you have just announced good news for Hong Kong people. I think most of us welcome that. But unfortunately, there was one Hong Kong people who happened to be a journalist, were not welcomed by Mainland China - they just take away their re-entry permits. So can you guarantee to us, Mr Prime Minister, after 1997, those permanent residents here in Hong Kong can come back to Hong Kong? Did you get any guarantee from China that we can come back to Hong Kong after 1997, June 30th?

Prime Minister: I am not quite sure of the facts of this particular case. I don't know where these journalists might be at the moment. I am always very protective of the interests of journalists, as the travelling party with me from the United Kingdom will confirm. But I don't know the background to this. If it seems as though there is some malpractice of some sort, clearly we would examine it and do what we could to help. But without having the details of the particular case, I would like to restrict my comment to that. I will make enquiries about it. If you will give the details to the Governor I will look at it.

Question (Paul Harrington, Agency France Press): We are all aware, Prime Minister, of the political obstructions to granting more British passports to Hong Kong people but you mentioned the moral imperative that Britain also had. Do you think that Hong Kong has got everything it deserved from Britain in this regard?

Prime Minister: We have tried to deal fairly with Hong Kong over the years. But the underlying premise of your question seemed to me to be that one is coming to the end of a period in which Britain will have any interest in Hong Kong. That emphatically is not the case. The Governor has been here representing, as well as I think anyone could have done, the interests of Hong Kong over recent years. Going back even earlier, the negotiation of the Joint Declaration was essential, and the determination of Basic Law was essential in the interests of Hong Kong, essential that the rule of law continues. And I have been here to try and assist with some of the problems that Hong Kong has.

So I believe yes, we have dealt fairly and honestly and openly with Hong Kong, and we will continue to do so, both in the short term and the long term.

Question: Specifically on the passports?

Governor: You've had your question.

Prime Minister: Yes, that is the answer.

Question (Bruce Gillie, Far East Economic Review): You announced with a great flourish the visa-free access decision and yet we all know that that can be revoked within a matter of days if someone, for example, the question raised by my British colleague about abuses comes up. So shouldn't you have offered some greater guarantee that that visa-free travel requirement can somehow be maintained? What is to stop the British Government from revoking it the moment some abuse is discovered?

Prime Minister: Well I don't see why we would be likely to do that. I didn't have to offer visa-free access now. I did so because I think it is in the interests of Hong Kong that we do so and I think it is in the interests of the United Kingdom that we do so for a raft of reasons as well. So I don't anticipate a short term reversal of this.

We have visa-free access for other countries. It would be equally true of you to say to me we could reverse visa-free access for all those other countries but we have had visa-free access for them for years, it hasn't been reversed. This is not an offer made in bad faith. This is an offer made in good faith and it is an offer that is going to be maintained. All visa-free access around the world is upon that basis and that is the basis upon which I have announced it today.

There is no need and no justification for people to poke around in the undergrowth of this statement to see if there is some trick underlying it. There is no trick.

Question (Trevor Cavanagh, The Sun): Prime Minister, a domestic question but one which I think may be of interest in this Crown territory. A number of MPs back home have expressed concern about the Royal Family, including Conservative MPs and including one Minister of the Crown who has asked for a debate on the Royal Family and the future of the Royal Family. Are you prepared to have one?

Prime Minister: I have heard no such comments made myself, Trevor, and I am disinclined to comment on domestic matters when I am so far away without having heard the domestic debate. I will happily respond to that point when I am back in the United Kingdom.

Governor: So we can have one more question on Hong Kong.

Question (John Leicester, the Associated Press): Prime Minister, could you just for the record explain to us in your opinion would disbanding Legco equal a breach of the Joint Declaration?

Prime Minister: I've said that. I've said that earlier.

Question (John Leicester, Associated Press): Not clearly though, I mean, so that we know that would disbanding Legco equal a breach of the Joint Declaration in your view.

Prime Minister: We believe that the Joint Declaration shouldn't be changed and this is partly for that reason that we've been arguing that Legco needs to go right the way through and I made it clear the damage that we believe would be done if Legco were to be disbanded, damage not just to Hong Kong, though certainly to Hong Kong, but also to China and that is a point we have made repeatedly to China and will continue to make to China.

Governor: Okay, thank you very much indeed. Many thanks Prime Minister.

End

ExCo welcomes visa-free assurance by Prime Minister

* * * * *

The following is a statement issued by the Convenor of the Executive Council, Rosanna Wong today (Monday):

"I am very pleased to learn the British Prime Minister Mr John Major has given the assurance that the future holders of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports will not be required to obtain visas to enter the United Kingdom after 1997. This will serve as a positive encouragement for other countries to offer similar visa-free arrangements in the future.

I am also heartened that the British Government has provided a guarantee to the non-Chinese ethnic minorities regarding admission and settlement in the UK after 1997 in the event that any member of this group should come under pressure to leave Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty. I particularly welcome the promise of full British citizenship for the wives and widows of ex-servicemen from HK who fought in the war.

All my colleagues in the Executive Council join me in welcoming this good news which is indeed a boost to the confidence of the Hong Kong community."

End

Visa-free status will help boost confidence

* * * * *

The decision by the British Government to grant holders of Hong Kong SAR passports visa free access to the United Kingdom will help boost confidence in Hong Kong, a government spokesman said today (Monday).

Welcoming the announcement made by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Mr John Major, the spokesman said it was important to the people of Hong Kong that their way of life would remain unchanged beyond 1997.

"Ease of travel for the people of Hong Kong is of vital importance to maintaining their confidence as well as the territory's status as a world-class financial and trading centre," he said.

"We hope that other countries around the world will follow the lead taken by the British Government and that the Chinese side will work closely with the British side to promote visa-free travel throughout the world for all Hong Kong people."

The spokesman also welcomed the guarantee given by the British Government in respect of admission and settlement for the non-Chinese ethnic minorities who would have no nationality other than British and would come under possible pressure to leave Hong Kong after 1997.

"Hong Kong Government had long recognised that non-Chinese ethnic minorities with solely British nationality represent a unique group who had particular anxieties about their own status in Hong Kong," he said.

"Their families have been in Hong Kong for many generations and generally they want to remain in Hong Kong which is their home.

"But they also need reassurances about their future."

The spokesman said the assurances given by the Prime Minister that wives and widows of ex-servicemen from Hong Kong would be granted full British citizenship discharged the debt of honour to the wives and widows of men who had fought to defend Hong Kong.

He noted that these decisions were taken after various representations from the Governor, the Executive Council, the Legislative Council and other parties concerned in the territory.

End

Government committed to promoting human rights

* * * * *

The Hong Kong Government's firm commitment to promoting, enhancing and protecting internationally recognised human rights has been reflected by the extension and application of human rights treaties to the territory, Principal Crown Counsel, Mr Stephen Wong, told the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva today (Monday, Geneva time).

In an opening statement at a meeting in which Hong Kong's 13th periodic report under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) was examined, Mr Wong said the Hong Kong Government had pursued this policy through legal processes, by adopting appropriate administrative measures and social programmes.

Noting that ICERD was the first of the major human rights treaties to be accepted and applied in the territory, he said it had always been regarded with particular importance by the Government and people of Hong Kong.

ICERD has since been followed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the conventions on torture and the rights of the child, while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women will shortly join the list.

Mr Wong updated members of the Committee on a number of developments in the territory following the submission of the 13th report to United Nations last August.

On the translation of the law into Chinese, he informed members that the process was progressing well.

"By December 31, 1995, we had prepared Chinese drafts of all the laws, including subsidiary-legislation, originally enacted in English only.

"The Bilingual Law Advisory Committee had examined a total of 275 ordinances and 190 had been declared authentic. The aim is to authenticate all remaining legislation before July 1997," Mr Wong said.

He also noted that the progress of the review of laws in the light of the Bill of Rights Ordinance (BORO) had been good and the number of amending bills had risen to 36.

Mr Wong said action was in hand to bring the provisions of a further four ordinances into line with the BORO.

"Provided that we can secure the necessary time slot, we intend to enact these amendments within the current legislative session," he said.

Further to the amendment to the Brewin Trust Ordinance which had been found inconsistent with the provisions of the BORO, the Wills Ordinance had recently been amended to remove a similar inconsistency.

"Previously, wills written wholly or substantially in Chinese by testators of Chinese race were exempt from the formal rules governing the valid execution of wills.

"That provision has been repealed so that the rules apply equally to the execution of all wills, regardless of the race of the testator or the language in which the will was drafted," he said.

Turning to equal opportunities, Mr Wong informed Committee members that the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and Disability Discrimination Ordinance had already been enacted last year.

He said the Hong Kong Government was currently consulting the public on the need for measures to deal with discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and family status while the public consultation on discrimination on the grounds of age was expected to be carried out in late April or early May.

Mr Wong said when the resources committed to these exercises were released, probably by the autumn of this year, the Administration would initiate a study on the question of racial discrimination with a view to establishing the extent of any problems in that area and to determine what measures may be necessary.

He said in the course of the study, the Government would examine each ordinance which appeared to confer benefits on persons of one race to the exclusion of others.

"Should the examination indicate that any of them are discriminatory, we will take whatever steps may be necessary to remedy the position," he said.

On the recreational needs of Hong Kong's community of foreign domestic helpers, Mr Wong said the Government, in collaboration with the voluntary Bayanihan Trust had opened five "Sunday-only" and one five-day recreational centres.

"These have proved popular and we intend to open a second five-day centre shortly. We are exploring the possibility of setting up permanent centres and facilities," he said.

On the Vietnamese migrants, Mr Wong reported to the Committee that some 48,000 of those who arrived after June 1988 had returned to Vietnam, 46,000 of them voluntarily.

He said the international community had resolved to expedite the process of repatriation in order to bring this unhappy saga to a close.

Turning to the objective of having all judicial proceedings conducted either in Chinese or in English and more judicial posts to be filled by local candidates by July 1997, Mr Wong said progress in both areas had been satisfactory.

He said legal history was made in December last year when for the first time in Hong Kong the High Court heard a civil case entirely in Chinese.

"This is a practice which the Judiciary will seek to use more and more whenever it is appropriate," he said.

Mr Wong also pointed out that further progress was achieved in mid-February when the restriction on the use of Chinese in the District Court and the Lands Tribunal was lifted.

"Also in the course of last year, five outstanding local lawyers joined the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the District Court. And six local lawyers, from both branches of the legal profession, volunteered to serve the community by accepting appointments to the Magistrates' Court."

"We are confident that by 1 July 1997, 50 per cent of all judicial posts would be filled by local candidates," he said.

On the Hong Kong Government's recruitment policy to the civil service, Mr Wong said since July 1993, it had been possible for officers originally recruited on overseas terms to transfer to local terms provided they were Hong Kong permanent residents.

He told the committee that as at January 1, there were 181,643 public servants, 179,999 (99.1 per cent) of them were on local terms and 1,644 (0.9 per cent) were on overseas terms, the latter having fallen from 3.5 per cent in 1960 and 2.3 per cent in 1980.

In conclusion, Mr Wong assured members of the committee that their comments and suggestions on the report would be faithfully reported back to London and Hong Kong and would be given the utmost detailed and careful study.

The study will be done constructively and positively and with an open mind at all times with the aim, which the United Kingdom and Hong Kong governments shared with the committee, of securing and advancing the full enjoyment in the territory of the rights set out in the Convention, he said.

End

New members of housing strategy review group appointed

* * * * *

The Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, has made two new appointments to the Steering Group set up to assist him in reviewing all major aspects of housing policy.

The group is also to suggest the most cost-effective way of meeting the Government's policy objective of providing adequate and affordable housing for the community.

The appointments of the Director of the Society for Community Organisation (SOCO), Mr Ho Hei-wah, and member of the Regional Council and Tai Po District Board with extensive public service, Mr Leung Wo-ping, were made after the Administration had carefully considered various suggestions for including more grassroots people on the Steering Group.

With the new appointments, the Steering Group under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Housing now has 12 members who come from various sections of the community.

In thanking Mr Ho and Mr Leung for accepting the appointments, Mr Wong said: "The expanded membership will ensure even greater input from the public and the housing-related sections of the community.

"We aim to complete the internal review in a few months' time and to issue a public consultation paper in the middle of this year, setting out our main conclusions and recommendations on the way ahead."

Mr Wong said the Steering Group was one of the avenues for the Administration to canvass public views during the course of review.

"We briefed the Legislative Council and the Housing Authority at the start of the exercise and have invited submissions from the general public.

"We will continue to monitor public views," he said.

All members of the Steering Group were appointed in their personal capacities to provide advice based upon their knowledge, and experience of housing-related matters.

Following is the membership list of the Steering Group on Long Term Housing Strategy Review:

Chairman

Mr Dominic Wong (Secretary for Housing)

Members

Mr Fung Tung	(Director of Housing)
Mr K Y Tang	(Government Economist)
Miss Rosanna Wong	(Chairman of Housing Authority)
Mr Victor So	(Executive Director of Housing Society)
Mr K Y Yeung	(businessman)
Mr Wan Man-yee	(businessman)
Mr Barry Cheung	(businessman)
Mr Anthony Wong Kin-wan	(banker)
Mr Kwok Kwok-chuen	(economist)
Mr Lau Kwok-yu	(academic)
Mr Ho Hei-wah	(social worker)
Mr Leung Wo-ping	(Regional Council and District Board member)

End

Government House gardens open to public

* * * * *

The Gardens of Government House will be open to the public on Sunday (March 10) from 10 am to 5 pm for residents to enjoy the azaleas in full bloom.

The open day has been an annual event since 1968.

Those wishing to visit Government House during the opening hours should enter by the east gate, which is located on Upper Albert Road facing the American Consulate.

They can leave by the main gate on Upper Albert Road or the west gate on Albert Path.

As a large number of people are expected to turn up, visitors are advised not to travel by private car or taxi.

If they do come by car or taxi, they are advised not to alight on Upper Albert Road.

End

New interest rate on tax reserve certificate authorised

* * * * *

The Secretary for the Treasury has authorised a decrease in the rate of interest payable on tax reserve certificates, it was gazetted last Friday (March 1).

As from March 4, the new annual interest rate will be 5.28 per cent as against the current rate of 5.64 per cent.

Interest on tax reserve certificates is calculated in monthly steps and the new rate will be \$0.44 per month per \$100. Simple interest will be credited as before in respect of complete months between purchase and surrender in payment of tax.

Interest is only credited when certificates are used to pay tax and no interest is due where the principal value of a certificate is repaid to the holders of such certificates.

The new rate will apply to all certificates issued on or after March 4.

Certificates which were issued before that day, subject to the general rule that interest ceases to accrue after 36 complete months, will continue to earn interest at the rates prevailing on their respective issue dates as follows:

3% per annum	for certificates issued on or after July 8, 1992, and before March 30, 1994;
3.84% per annum	for certificates issued on or after March 30, 1994, and before May 25, 1994;
4.56% per annum	for certificates issued on or after May 25, 1994, and before August 24, 1994;

- 5.04% per annum for certificates issued on or after August 24, 1994, and before December 4, 1995;
- 5.64% per annum for certificates issued on or after December 4, 1995, and before March 4, 1996; and
- 5.28% per annum for certificates issued on or after March 4, 1996, until further notice.

End

Magistrate's resignation announced

* * * * *

The Judiciary announced today (Monday) that Mr Warner Banks had tendered his resignation as a Magistrate on March 2. The resignation took immediate effect.

On his resignation, Mr Banks ceased to be a public officer, and the disciplinary hearing before the Investigating Committee which was scheduled to commence this morning therefore came to a halt.

End

Hung Hom road links contract signed

* * * * *

Work on the Hung Hom Bypass and Princess Margaret Road Link and roadwork in Hung Hom Bay project is to commence on Friday (March 8).

The \$1,444 million contract for the project was signed today (Monday) by the Director of Highways, Mr Leung Kwok-sun, and representatives of the Maeda-Chun Wo Joint Venture.

The Hung Hom Bypass will be a 1.3 kilometre-long elevated dual-two carriageway from Salisbury Road in Tsim Sha Tsui to Hung Hom Road in Hung Hom.

The Princess Margaret Road Link will be a 1.2 kilometre-long elevated dual-two carriageway connecting the Hung Hom Bypass with Chatham Road South, and Princess Margaret Road.

These elevated carriageways comprise a number of pre-stressed concrete bridge structures. To maintain traffic flows in the area, segmental construction method will be employed for some bridge sections.

Upon completion in 1999, these two roads will be the primary access to the Hung Hom Bay reclamation area and help improve the existing traffic conditions in Hung Hom.

Motorists can then use the Princess Margaret Road Link and the Hung Hom Bypass for access to the Kowloon-Canton Railway podium and Tsim Sha Tsui East and Hung Hom areas thus relieving traffic congestion on the Cross Harbour Tunnel approach roads and Chatham Road South.

The contract also includes the construction of 3.7 kilometres of ground level roads in the Hung Hom Bay Reclamation. These roads will link with the two main elevated carriageways via slip road ramps to form an integrated road network serving future developments on the reclamation.

Comprehensive landscaping works will be carried out at the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront promenade and on the Hung Hom reclamation area.

The existing Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront promenade will be extended eastward by an elevated walkway to connect with the future Hung Hom Bay waterfront promenade.

The works have been designed on behalf of the Major Works Project Management Office of the Highways Department by Maunsell Consultants Asia Limited who will also supervise the contractor's work.

End

Over 9,000 agreements lodged with Land Registry in February

* * * * *

A total of 9,175 sale and purchase agreements for building units, including both residential and non-residential properties, were lodged with the Land Registry in February.

The figure represented an increase of 0.2 per cent from that of January 1996, and an increase of 127.4 per cent when compared with the same month last year.

The total consideration of these agreements is \$26.02 billion, up 14.4 per cent and up 118.9 per cent as compared with the amounts for January 1996 and February 1995 respectively.

The figures are contained in the monthly statistics released today (Monday) by the Land Registry on deeds relating to property transactions received for registration in the Urban and New Territories Land Registries last month.

Relevant statistics for January 1996 and February 1995 were provided for comparison.

Figures on sale and purchase agreements received for the past 12 months and the year-on-year rate of change were also released.

The statistics generally relate to land transactions executed up to four weeks prior to their submission for registration, as there is usually a time lag between the execution of deeds and their lodgement for registration.

End

Sponsor for 1997 Lunar New Year fireworks display sought

* * * * *

Organisations wishing to sponsor the 1997 Lunar New Year fireworks display are requested to submit expressions of interest to the Government before April 30, a spokesman for the Recreation and Culture Branch (RCB) said today (Friday).

Fireworks displays have been held over the Victoria Harbour in the evening of the second day of the Lunar New Year since 1982 to celebrate the spring festival.

Each year, the event has attracted hundreds of thousands of spectators, some even from overseas, the spokesman said.

Expressions of interest should be sent in writing to the Secretary for Recreation and Culture (SRC), 41st floor, Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai.

They will be considered by the Fireworks Vetting Committee to be chaired by the SRC, with representatives from the two municipal councils and a number of departments and branches.

Enquiries can be made at RCB on 2594 5657 during office hours.

End

Central allocation of primary one places

* * * * *

All children who have applied for a public-sector primary one place but have not secured a discretionary place will be centrally allocated to a government or aided primary school for school entry in September.

Parents will receive a letter from the Primary One Admission Unit of the Education Department requesting them to go to a specified distribution and collection centre to collect a "choice of schools" form and a list of all government and aided primary schools in their home school net from Saturday (March 9) to March 11 (Monday) from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm and 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

Senior Education Officer (Primary One Admission), Mrs Pak Au Tak-chuen, reminded parents to return the completed forms to the same centre within the specified period.

All distribution and collection centres will remain open during the specified time on Sunday (March 10).

If parents have not received the letter by Friday (March 8), they should contact the Primary One Admission Unit on 2832 7700 immediately.

"The central allocation of primary one places is solely based on parents' choices with no reference to the points system", Mrs Pak said.

"However, when a school is oversubscribed, a randomisation method will be used to ensure fairness to all," she added.

Parents who have moved house recently or are planning to move house in the near future must inform the Primary One Admission Unit so that arrangements can be made to allocate a place to their children in their new home school net.

Results of the central allocation will be released in early June.

Meanwhile, parents and members of the public are welcome to make use of the department's automatic telephone enquiry service 2891 0088 for the latest information on the primary one central allocation system.

End

Special stamps on 1996 Olympic Games to be issued

* * * * *

The Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman, today (Monday) announced that a set of special stamps on the theme of "1996 Olympic Games" will be issued on March 20.

There will be four denominations depicting four popular sports in Hong Kong - gymnastics (\$1.2), diving (\$2.1), athletics (\$2.6) and basketball (\$5).

Souvenir sheet incorporating the four stamps will also be issued but the colour used for the Royal Cypher, the Olympic rings and the inscription "Hong Kong" will be different. The stamps were designed by Mr Bon Kwan and printed by Ashton-Potter (USA) Ltd.

A special feature of the stamps is that they will be tagged with a phosphorescent ink which will facilitate the automatic process of mail facing and segregation by Culler Facer Cancellor machines to be introduced by the Post Office shortly.

The stamps will be displayed for the advance information of the public at the General Post Office, Tsim Sha Tsui, Tsuen Wan and Sha Tin Central post offices as from Wednesday (March 6).

Official first day covers will be on sale at \$1 each at all post offices as from Wednesday. Advance order for serviced first day covers will be accepted from Wednesday to March 13. The minimum number of serviced first day covers per order is five.

A restriction of 20 souvenir sheets and two sheets of each denomination (that is 100 sets of stamps) per customer queuing will be imposed on the first day of issue on March 20.

A beautifully designed presentation pack containing the four stamps will also be on sale at \$19 each at all post offices from the same day.

Serviced first day covers affixed with the set of stamps and cancelled with the first day of issue special postmark will be on sale at \$14.40 each on March 20 at the following eight philatelic offices:

- * Airport Post Office
- * Beaconsfield House Post Office
- * General Post Office
- * Granville Road Post Office
- * Peak Post Office
- * Sha Tin Central Post Office
- * Tsim Sha Tsui Post Office
- * Tsuen Wan Post Office

A special postmark will be introduced for the hand-back service at all post offices on the same day to official and privately made covers bearing the first day of issue indication.

A set of five postcards reproducing the stamp and first day cover designs, issued by the Amateur Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, will also be on sale at all post offices at \$18 per set as from Wednesday.

End

New maternal and child health centre open

A new maternal and child health centre set up by the Department of Health in Sai Wan Ho will commence operation on Friday (March 8), bringing the total number of such centres in Hong Kong to 47.

"The centre will provide a comprehensive range of health services to women of child-bearing ages and children from birth to five years old.

"These services include infant and child health care, immunisation, comprehensive observation service, as well as antenatal, postnatal and family planning services," a spokesman for the department said today (Monday).

The centre is located on the second floor, Sai Wan Ho Health Centre, 28 Tai Hong Street, Sai Wan Ho, and its telephone number is 2884 4599.

It will be open from 9 am to 1 pm and 2 pm to 5 pm on weekdays, and 9 am to 1 pm on Saturdays. No service will be provided on Sundays and public holidays.

End

Water storage figure

Storage in Hong Kong's reservoirs at 9 am today (Monday) stood at 79.2 per cent of capacity or 463.966 million cubic metres.

This time last year the reservoirs contained 402.348 million cubic metres of water, representing 68.7 per cent of capacity.

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	1,932	0930	+868
Closing balance in the account	2,197	1000	+868
Change attributable to :		1100	+868
Money market activity	+868	1200	+868
LAF today	-603	1500	+868
		1600	+868

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.5 *+0.0* 04.03.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.70	2 years	2802	5.16	99.74	5.37
1 month	4.80	3 years	3901	5.57	99.99	5.65
3 months	4.92	5 years	5012	6.38	101.05	6.21
6 months	5.02	7 years	7302	6.02	97.34	6.61
12 months	5.06	5 years	M502	7.30	103.54	6.51

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$10,033 million

Closed March 4, 1996

End