



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Monday, June 11, 1973

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PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RATES AND DISABILITY ALLOWANCE INCREASED BY 11 PER CENT

The government is to increase the rate of public assistance and disability allowance with effect from the beginning of next month.

The increases, which have been approved by the Finance Committee, amount to approximately 11 per cent overall and are intended to restore the purchasing power of the public assistance rates so that they are worth as much as they were when new rates were introduced in April 1972.

Commenting on the increases, Mr. T.S. Heppell, Assistant Director of Social Welfare, said today: "When the government introduced the expanded public assistance scheme in 1971, it promised that the rate of the allowances would be kept under regular review. In April 1972, the rates were substantially increased, by about 60 per cent.

"This further increase with effect from July 1 demonstrates that the government is determined to protect the interests of the poorest members of the community -- those who are receiving public assistance," he said.

The new rates of public assistance will be as follows, the old rates are shown in brackets:-

For a single person on his own	\$120	(\$110)
For a family:		
First three eligible members	\$ 90	(\$ 80) each
Next three eligible members	\$ 70	(\$ 65) each
Each additional eligible member	\$ 55	(\$ 50) each

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Because the rate of disability and infirmity allowance is linked with the rate of public assistance, that too is being increased from July 1.

As from then, the allowance payable to a severely disabled person will be \$120 a month (instead of \$110) and that payable to someone aged 75 or over will be \$60 (instead of \$55).

A severely disabled person getting public assistance as well, will receive an increase in both allowances.

In addition, the maximum rent allowance payable is also being increased, in line with the rents for new government housing estates. This is because the amount allowed for rent is linked to the rent payable for government housing.

At present, in calculating the amount of assistance, an allowance is made for rent which is either the actual rent payable or a maximum figure based on government housing rents, whichever is the lower.

Mr. Heppell gave two examples of what the changes mean.

- * A family of five members will receive an additional \$40 a month in public assistance plus in some cases an extra amount for rent. In future the assistance "level" for a family of five will be \$410 plus allowances for rent, education and other expenses. The rent allowance could be up to \$112 a month.
- * A single disabled person who qualifies for a disability allowance as well as public assistance will receive an extra \$20 a month plus an additional \$10 for rent. This will give him a monthly income of \$275 plus any other special allowances.

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PENSIONS INCREASED BY THREE PER CENT

Approval has been given for a three per cent *ex-gratia* increase in government pensions with effect from April 1, 1972.

Government pensioners whose first day of retirement was on or before April 1, 1972 and have reached the age of 55 or more will be granted the increase.

Those pensioners who retired after that date will not be eligible for the increase but their pensions will be adjusted to take into account the recent government salary changes.

Widows and Orphans pensions in payment on April 1 last year will also be increased on an *ex-gratia* basis by three per cent with effect from that date.

The increase in pensions will cost approximately \$3 million for the current financial year.

Pensioners who are eligible for the revised benefits will receive them in their payments for September, 1973.

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AVERAGE PRICE RISE OF 6 PER CENT IN 1972

The general price level in Hong Kong rose by an estimated average of 6.4 per cent during 1972, according to a review of the Hong Kong Consumer Price Index.

The figure compares with rises of 3.5 per cent in 1971, 5.7 per cent in 1970 and five per cent in 1969.

An account of the movements of the index, the influencing factors and comparative figures are contained in a special article in the Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics.

The review points out that the General Consumer Price Index "which had moved upward relatively slowly in 1971, showed a faster upward movement in 1972".

It says that fluctuations in the index during the year were largely influenced by movements in prices of foodstuffs, especially when supplies were affected by typhoons and rainstorms during the summer.

Despite these fluctuations, the review says, the underlying trend was upwards.

The article reveals that the largest increase in prices of foodstuffs was for fresh vegetables, which rose by 20 per cent over that of 1971.

Illustrating some of the fluctuations, the review says that the General Consumer Price Index rose to 142 in June last year, from 138 the previous month, due to the sharp increase in food prices caused by the rainstorm.

In September it rose to a new peak of 143, brought about by an unusual drop in the supply of fresh vegetables. The "high" was again reached in November due to a typhoon threat at the beginning of the month.

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NEW MARKET FOR YUEN LONG

A temporary market will be built in Yuen Long to provide better facilities for residents there.

The market, covering an area of about 20,000 square feet, is situated between Pau Cheung Street and Sai Tai Street in Yuen Long Town.

Covered accommodation is being provided at the northern end for 81 market stalls, while the existing open hawker bazaar at the other end facing Pau Cheung Street will be re-arranged to take 236 new hawker stall sites.

The market will be enclosed by a 6-foot high chain link fence with 11 entrances.

A single storey management office will also be provided within the market.

The construction work is expected to commence in mid-July and will take three months to complete.

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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CHANGES

Mr. Lee Quo-wei, an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council, has ceased to be a temporary Unofficial Member of the Executive Council, with effect from last Saturday (June 9). This follows the return to Hong Kong of Sir Yuet-keung Kan.

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MORE HELP FOR THE AGED

The government and the community of Hong Kong are trying to do more for the aged, and the Chung Shak-hei (Cheung Chau) Home for the Aged is to have a significant role to play.

The New Territories District Commissioner, Mr. I.F.C. Macpherson, said this today at the home's swearing-in ceremony of the 1973-74 Board of Directors when he paid tribute to the service provided by the institution in the past few years.

The success of the home, he said, is testified by the grant of \$10,000 subvention by the Social Welfare Department, and by its plans to expand the facilities to accommodate more elderly people.

The home now has accommodation for 50 people, and, pending a grant from the Government Lotteries Fund, it expects to accommodate 20 more in a year's time.

Mr. Macpherson said the proposed expansion would not be an easy task for a relatively small community like Cheung Chau. But he understood that the land and part of the funds required were already in hand.

He described the readiness of the home to run a dormitory for the aged in the proposed Cheung Chau Estate as "very worthwhile".

"I have asked the District Officer to do his best to assist," he added.

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DISPUTE AT HONG KONG AIRPORT SETTLED

A dispute involving the Express Transport and Building Contractors Ltd. and 23 of its workers engaged on the Hong Kong Airport construction site has been amicably settled.

The dispute began on May 29 when the dismissed workers refused to surrender their airport entry permits and returned to the work site to demand severance pay.

Officers of the Labour Relations Service of the Labour Department visited the site twice and subsequently managed to bring the parties concerned to the conference table.

Under the agreement reached on June 8, the workers received a sum of about \$17,000 from the management.

Commenting on the settlement, Mr. Sin Kwok-hung, Labour Officer in charge of the Labour Relations Service (Kowloon East) said: "The willingness of both parties to accept our conciliation service and their readiness to compromise have helped to bring about an early settlement".

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PRESENTATION FOR BEST GOVERNMENT APPRENTICE

This year's winner of the "Brown Cup" for the best apprentice in government workshops is Mr. Leung Hip-hung of the Waterworks Office.

Mr. J.A. Wallace, Principal Government Electrical and Mechanical Engineer, will present the cup to Mr. Leung in a ceremony to be held on Wednesday (June 13).

The "Brown Cup" is awarded to an apprentice in government workshops, who makes the best progress in any year either in practical or student classes or both.

It was donated by Mr. J.C. Brown, who served as a Chief Electrical and Mechanical Engineer of the Public Works Department between 1948 and 1959.

Mr. Leung started his apprenticeship in August, 1968. His practical work has been of consistently high standard throughout this period.

His technical education has also been consistent and in the latest sessional examination he was first in his class.

During the presentation ceremony, the official signing of indentures of 24 technical apprentices will also take place.

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Note to Editors: You are invited to send a reporter and/or photographer to cover the ceremony which will take place at 3 p.m. on Wednesday (June 13) in the Cinema Room, Civil Aid Services Building, Caroline Hill Road, Hong Kong.

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Release time: 7.00 p.m.