




DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Messages from the Queen and Foreign Secretary

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The Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, has received messages of sympathy for the victims and families and friends of the Garley Building fire from Her Majesty the Queen and the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind. The text of the messages are as follows:

Message from Her Majesty the Queen:

"Please convey my heartfelt sympathy to all those who lost members of their families or friends, or who suffered injury, in yesterday's tragic fire. My thoughts are with you at this difficult time.

Elizabeth R"

Message from the Foreign Secretary:

"I was appalled to hear the news of the tragedy in Kowloon. On behalf of the British Government I send you our deepest sympathy.

Malcolm Rifkind"

End

Governor's statement on fire at Garley Building

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Following is a statement by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, on the fire at Garley Building, Jordan in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

I would like to begin this afternoon by making a statement and taking your questions on the appalling fire that occurred in Jordan yesterday evening. If there is time, then we can go on later to discuss my recent visit to Europe to lobby for visa free access and the question of human rights reporting. But it is obviously the tragedy which took place in Hong Kong last night which is on all our minds today.

Let me tell the Council what we understand to be the latest position. I am sure that the Council will understand that it is difficult at present to be precise about the figures. We are still trying to identify bodies and relate those who were reported missing to the bodies that can be identified. But the position as I left to come to the Legislative Council this afternoon was that 37 people have been confirmed killed. There may be two other confirmed fatalities. Seventy-eight people have been injured. Thirty-nine people have been reported missing. But this number may include some of those whom we already know have been killed, but whose bodies have not yet been identified. As Honourable Members will understand there are considerable difficulties in identifying the bodies that have been found, many of which have been very badly burned. The Fire Services Department, assisted by forensic experts from the Police, are in the process of combing the entire building. It will not be until this lengthy process is completed that we will be in a position to issue final casualty figures.

This is plainly a terrible tragedy. I would like to extend on behalf of the community our deep sympathy to the families of all of those who have lost loved ones. Let me pay tribute to Senior Fireman Liu Chi-hung, who lost his life battling courageously to save the lives of others.

Let me pay tribute also to the great bravery and skill of our emergency services in tackling this disaster. The Fire Service, the Police, the Ambulance Service, the Government Flying Service, the Auxiliary Medical Services, the Hospital Authority and the St John's Ambulance worked tirelessly to fight the fire and rescue the victims. Their efforts are still continuing. I wish to pay a special tribute to the Fire Services Officers who have behaved with the bravery and dedication which we know and expect from them. I visited the scene of the fire yesterday evening as well as the hospitals treating the injured; and the Chief Secretary has been there this morning. We saw for ourselves the scale of the disaster and the difficulties facing the emergency services.

Our task now is to do everything we can to assist the victims of this fire and to help the families of those who have lost their lives. I have instructed that no effort should be spared to make sure this happens. A press conference will be held at 4 pm this afternoon by the Director of Fire Services, the Director of Home Affairs, the Director of Social Welfare and a representative of the Hospital Authority to provide as much information as possible on the fire, and what we are doing in its aftermath.

We must also make absolutely sure that we all learn lessons from this tragedy, and do everything we can to minimise the risk of it ever happening again in our crowded, congested city. The Director of Fire Services will conduct an immediate investigation into the fire. This investigation will try to establish the cause of the fire and the reasons why so many people died and were injured. Its preliminary findings will be available within two weeks, and we will make public everything that we are legally able to make public at that stage. In the light of these findings, I will decide whether to establish a full Commission of Inquiry chaired by a Judge.

Obviously what happened last night underlines the importance of one thing - the importance of this Council passing as rapidly as possible the legislation which we have put to it, and which it has quite properly been considering thoroughly, to tighten up fire safety regulations. The Fire Safety (Commercial Premises) Bill was put to this Council on 29 May this year. When this legislation is in place, it will allow our Fire Services to take action to improve fire safety in places like Garley Building. Those improvements will help to retard the rapid spread of fire on the lower floors of a building like the one in this incident. The Bill also contains measures to improve emergency escapes and means of access for fire fighting and rescue. These will allow the Fire Services speedier access to such buildings. I am not criticising this Council for examining this Bill in detail. It is an important Bill. But let us now act as quickly as possible to put this legislation on to the Statute Book so we can start to implement it on the ground. We will obviously, in the light of this incident and the investigation into it, urgently wish to see whether a further Bill is required, for example to extend the scope of the new legislation specifically into office premises.

Before I take your questions, let me make a final plea. I do hope that in the coming days all of us will act with the greatest possible sensitivity towards the injured, and towards the families of those who have been injured or killed. They have quite enough to deal with already without undue and unwanted intrusions into their grief.

Hong Kong is a great city. It has achieved some of the greatest economic successes known to any city over the last half century. But our life is still marred by too many preventable tragedies. Trying to put in place the sort of regulations which can and do save lives is not a hindrance to Hong Kong's competitiveness, not an intolerable addition to the costs of business in Hong Kong, not unnecessary intrusion or interference by Government. It is merely a recognition of what is required in any prosperous and civilised society to give its citizens the protection in their daily lives which they deserve and which they have a right to expect.

End

Governor's question-and-answer session in LegCo

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Following is a transcript of the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten's question-and-answer session in the Legislative Council today (Thursday):

Mr Eric Li (in Chinese): Mr Governor, I am sure all colleagues in this Council would join me in supporting you for the efforts you have made in this appalling fire and we would also like to join you to pay tribute to the emergency services, including the Fire Services officers. And also to the injured and to the families of victims, we would also like to express our sympathy. But to fulfil my duty as a member of this Council I have to ask a difficult question and I hope the Governor could answer it.

A simple question. Now, last night, Mr Governor, you went to the scene of the fire. Did you join in the supervision of the fire-rescue work?

Governor: No, certainly not. The job is one for the Operational Commander on the spot. When I visited the scene of the fire it, I think, appeared to those who had been fighting it that all those who were alive had been got out of the building. When I arrived the fire was still being fought but I think I am right in saying that there was no indication of any people who were still alive who needed to be rescued.

But I am bound to tell the honourable gentleman that I was impressed, as ever, by the quiet competence and bravery of those who briefed me about what had happened and who told me what they thought the position was.

Mr Eric Li (in Chinese): Mr President, Mr Governor went to visit the scene of the fire; he also gave encouragement to those involved in the rescue operation and I could fully appreciate that. But, today, I have heard some comments from the public, i.e. towards the evening last night, when there were the highest number of casualties, that was the time when many dignitaries went to visit the scene, so that was the time when there were the highest number of casualties and fatalities. Now, I do not know if that is true but, Mr Governor, could you conduct a thorough investigation to see if that is a fact?

And also, in future, under similar circumstances, would you be able to ensure that when dignitaries visit the scene of the fire they would not be in any way hindering the rescue operation? Because maybe officers would have to brief you and that would distract them from their rescue operations, so could you lay down some clear principles or guidelines for that purpose?

Governor: I think that the honourable gentleman needs to be careful with this line of questioning. Let me tell him what my own position was and remains. I was kept informed during the evening of the tragedy, and shortly after having gone out to dinner was telephoned with the news of an escalation in the number of those who were apparently injured, was told that the fire itself was under control, that there were no other people waiting to be rescued in the building, and it was suggested that I should go to the hospital and perhaps the scene of the incident. Since I was told that the rescue of people inside the building was no longer at issue I decided to go to the scene of the tragedy before going on to the hospital.

I would under no circumstances go to a tragedy or, for example, go to a stake-out by the police, if there was an operation being carried on at that time which could affect whether or not people's lives were saved. I think if there were any dignitaries who went - to borrow the honourable gentleman's phrase - any dignitaries who went to the incident earlier, it would have been in the line of duty. When I arrived at the scene, for example, the Secretary for Security, quite properly, was there, since it is the men and women for whom he is responsible who were actually dealing with the incident. But he certainly would not, any more than I would, seek to intervene in operational matters.

I think there were several visits later on by other people to the hospital. And, as the honourable gentleman will know, the Chief Secretary herself visited this morning. But I am not aware of any case of the operation being hindered by dignitaries at the scene of the accident before I was there. And I repeat what I said to the honourable gentleman about the timing of my arrival.

Mr James To (in Chinese): Mr President, I'd just like to ask the Governor this, because yesterday and today it seems that in his opening statement he said that the relevant legislation is now with the LegCo and that is the Fire Safety Commercial Premises Bill. And it is said that the Bill will have a direct applicability on buildings similar to the one involved in the fire disaster. I would like to get a clarification from the Governor.

Actually, as a matter of fact, for the Bill in its present form no mention has been made of regular commercial premises, apart from the five specified uses. For instance, for the regular office premises, actually the Bill has no specific application on those. And so what the Governor has said, actually, was kind of misleading to the public in the sense that the present legislative proposal is now being scrutinised by LegCo, but that is not actually the case. I would like to get clarification from the Governor on this.

Governor: Well, let me give that clarification and tell the honourable gentleman why what I've said isn't misleading the public.

Why have we introduced the Bill? We introduced the Bill, as the honourable gentleman will know, following the tragic fire in the bank at Shek Kip Mei in January, 1994. The legislation will cover premises where the fire safety measures no longer meet current standards. The investigation into that fire in 1994, showed that certain types of premises, including banks, off-course betting centres, jewellery and goldsmith shops, supermarkets, department stores and shopping arcades presented particular risks because of their size and the large numbers of people passing through. This legislation has been carefully developed to address precisely those risks. The legislation covers commercial premises. The fire safety measures necessary for such places are not necessarily the same as those for say business or residential buildings and we'll review the need for new legislation to cover other types of premises in the light of the investigation report, as I said in my remarks.

So I do believe that since the bottom floors of the building in question are commercial premises they would've fallen within the scope of the legislation.

Mr James To (in Chinese): Mr President, I would like to follow-up. ... must clarify that the Bill will cover five premises but not regular commercial offices. I would like to ask the Governor this; does he feel that, actually we don't have to wait until the investigation results are out, actually over the years, all along the Administration knows that for old commercial buildings such problem already exists. I don't want to go back too far, for instance Mr Samuel Wong, sitting right next to me, years ago has written to the Administration calling for action in this field. I would like to know whether we necessarily have to wait until the investigation is completed and whether we have to wait until the enquiry is completed, or can the Administration start considering it right now?

Governor: Let me be extremely restrained in my reply. While we've been discussing this legislation, I'm not aware that the Government has been pressed to get on with things more rapidly. I'm sure, perfectly understandably, the pressures on the Government have been to make sure that we're not demanding too much of commercial premises in a short time. Perhaps what we need to do with issues like this is to strike a sensible balance. We want to put in place proper regulations. We want to do it as rapidly as possible. Of course, it's quite proper for this Council and others to be able to comment on the adequacy of the regulations we're seeking to put in place but I don't think we should be in a position in which before tragedies happen we want too much discussion and after tragedies happen we don't want any. What we have to do is to make sure that we put in place sensible arrangements which are properly considered and which can prevent tragedies like this happening.

Miss Margaret Ng: Mr President, I would respectfully join the Governor in his appeal to the community not to intrude into the grief of the families of these fire victims. However, I am also concerned that because this is a commercial building and people caught in it are working wage-earners, and therefore I am concerned that these families may be in some immediate financial worries. Has the administration been doing anything to make discreet enquiries as to whether ... might be brought to the families of these victims, the families concerned?

Governor: Can I thank the honourable lady for the first remark that she made which I am sure the whole Council would endorse and which I hope will be taken account of by everyone in the community, by all sections of the community, over the coming days and weeks. It is an important issue. I am not going to be any more specific than that but I hope people will take what I have said and what the honourable lady has said to heart.

Secondly, she is entirely right about the importance of not only counselling in providing psychological support but also counselling in offering financial support if it is required. A package of assistance is available from emergency relief funds including: injury grant, disability grant, burial grant and death gratuity. We can also provide assistance to families in need with child-care. So there is a range of financial support which is available and I can assure the honourable lady that we will be going into a little more detail about that in the press conference that will be held at 4 o'clock.

I think there is a real problem in any community when a tragedy like this happens and it is a problem which I have discussed today with the Chief Secretary, and that is how you make sure that the relatives of those who may have been injured or killed, who may have a family member missing, are kept as informed as possible in circumstances where information is partial, is not complete and is changing all the time as you learn more about a tragedy which has taken place. It is very difficult to get it right but we have to try even harder than we are at the moment.

Dr Leong Che-hung: ... in grief, just like you, by what has happened in Garley Building yesterday, and I am sure all members of this Council would join with you and also be very appreciative of your concern for not only the victims but also the staff that have been working very hard to do their best. What we should really be looking for is lessons that can be learned so that, hopefully, such accidents or incident won't happen again.

Governor, you mentioned that there was a bill introduced into this Council sometime in May, which if it had taken effect could well have prevented to a certain extent such incidents as happened yesterday. I do hope that, Governor, you are not implying that had this bill been passed by this Council earlier this would not have happened. Because I am sure you would understand that there is a certain machinery in this Council on scrutinising bills and that every bill introduced into this Council is as important as any other one and that members of this Council have been working very diligently to achieve that certain direction. And I have to say this simply because I do represent the House.

Governor: Can I remind the honourable gentleman what I said because I went out of my way to avoid, I hope, sounding as though I was putting any criticism on the Council for quite properly considering this measure thoroughly. I said:

"The Fire Safety Commercial Premises Bill was put to this Council on 29 May this year. When this legislation is in place it will allow our Fire Services to take action to improve fire-safety" etc, etc.

And I said earlier that the Council had been quite properly considering the bill thoroughly. Let me also remind the honourable gentleman what I said in response to his honourable friend.

"I think we have to strike a nice balance between before something happens thinking we have got all the time in the world and after it happens thinking we must rush at it."

This is not a moment when any of us should be criticising one another on these matters but we have got to work together to get a decent properly considered set of regulations in place.

Mr Albert Chan (in Chinese): Mr President, Mr Governor, on this tragic incident I'm sure all members are very concerned about it and on the part of the fire services and others involved in the rescue, we do pay tribute to their bravery.

Now on the fire fighting itself, I think members of the public and the media saw something from TV reports and they inevitably would ask some questions. Now I have no intention to query the way the fire services handled the incident, but we are in a very crowded city and we are talking (about) a major catastrophe. Now do they have enough equipment, are they properly equipped? I have some doubts. I'm not querying them but I have some doubts. I could see there were many people waiting to be rescued next to windows. They had to wait a long time before they were rescued and also we saw only a small number of hydraulic platforms put in action. And also for a long time we could see there was fire spreading and we could see the flames burning and it was a long time before we saw hoses being directed at them.

So the impression we gathered was that we had a Government with a huge reserve but was it providing enough equipment to our fire services, so that they could do their job in a congested city like ours, especially when they are involved in high rise rescue operations? So are they properly equipped? Will that be included in the investigation, the review so that in future when there is a similar incident our fire services will be properly equipped to handle such an incident?

Governor: The honourable gentleman mentioned the scenes on television and of course, one reason why this tragedy will have made such an impact on so many people is because of those graphic pictures that people saw on television of people waiting to be rescued and of the brave operations of the fire services and others.

I think it's dangerous, and I'm glad the honourable member avoided the trap, I think it's dangerous for any of us until there's been a full investigation to jump to conclusions about operational issues about the availability of equipment and so on.

But let me make two points to the honourable member; the fire was reported, I'm advised, at 4.48 pm and the fire services were at the scene within three minutes. They sent in all 86 appliances and 460 firemen to the scene. In addition they provided 75 ambulances and 236 ambulancemen. I asked the Director of Fire Services, specifically, this morning whether they had enough equipment, enough appliances, on the spot and he believed that they had had enough on the spot. But obviously that is something which he will want to review and others will want to review when they look at the detail.

I can assure the honourable gentleman that if it's clear from this enquiry that we need to spend more on equipment, on appliances, then we will have no hesitation in doing so and I think I can speak with the authority of having the Financial Secretary next to me. You can't cut costs or cut corners when you're faced with a tragedy like this.

Can I add something that I should've said when I was asked a question, quite properly, by the Chairman of the House Committee. The Chairman represents the medical functional constituency and I saw many of his members, some of whom I'm sure voted for him, some of whom may not have voted for him, working last night. I'd seen similar scenes after the tragedy involving the children at Sha Tin a few months ago. I didn't, ah, the honourable gentleman has left. I didn't stay long enough to get in the way of those who were seeking to bandage the injured, to give them the initial cosmetic care they needed for burns or certainly to get in the way of those who were working very hard in the intensive care unit, but every honourable member, the honourable member saw it for himself as well, every honourable member who'd been in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital last night and I'm sure the same was true in Kwong Wah and elsewhere, would have been very impressed by the number of those working, by their dedication and hard work, by their energy and professionalism. We have, in Hong Kong, a medical service of which we can be very proud.

Mr Albert Chan (in Chinese): Thank you Mr Governor, for your reply and I would also like to thank the Government for giving priority to resources consideration if it is proven necessary in the provision of fire services equipment.

Now in the course of the review, that may take some time and it will be some time before we have the findings. If in this review the fire services could first of all complete section on equipment, then would the Government first of all consider that instead of waiting for the completion of the entire report?

Governor: Well, if it becomes apparent very quickly in the review that there is a real problem of equipment, we'll of course have to address that very rapidly. But I think what we first of all need to do is to get the report, within the next fortnight. It may well be the case that, as happened with the Lan Kwai Fong tragedy at New Year 1992/93, it may well be the case that we will feel and the community will feel that there should be a full commission of enquiry under a judge. But I thought it was right, first of all, to get the facts as quickly as possible and if those facts suggest courses of action which we should take very rapidly, then we won't hesitate to do so.

Mrs Selina Chow (in Chinese): Thank you Mr President. First of all I would hope that the Governor would know this, that is about the Bill: there is a Bills Committee and we are sitting on that committee and this very morning the Chairman or the Convenor to the Bills Committee, Mr James To, concerning the branches and departments that work with us on the Bill, we have paid tribute to them because this is a very complex Bill and within a short period of time we managed to resolve many problems and we managed to come to some sort of a decision. And I just want to let you know, Mr Governor, that we did not have too much discussion before, we had an appropriate level of discussion and now the problems have been resolved satisfactorily. And I hope that by telling you this you would become more reassured.

About last night, just now the Governor said that when he was there last night there was an Operational Commander. I would like to know who that was. The reason why I ask this is this: because in the past when we had emergencies there was the Emergency Co-ordination Centre which was supposed to co-ordinate all disaster relief efforts because these efforts probably would involved more than one government department. And ever since June this year, it seems that the Emergency Co-ordination Centre is renamed the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre.

I would like to ask the Governor this question - last night the disaster happened - whether the Emergency Centre played any part? If not, who was in overall charge of the entire rescue operation?

I am not trying to pick on the heads of the departments that were involved in the rescue operation, I am sure all of them have done their very best, but in a major disaster of this kind, inter-departmental efforts have to be co-ordinated by some party. I would like to know who was responsible for that last night. And if there was no overall co-ordinator last night, would you in the upcoming review consider setting up such a co-ordinating mechanism so that in future - heaven forbid of course - if a similar disaster occurs and inter-departmental efforts are called for, a co-ordinator will be there to co-ordinate all the efforts?

Governor: Can I first of all say once again that I think the honourable member and I are at one in recognising that important pieces of legislation cannot simply be ushered through the Legislative Council on the nod, they require thorough deliberation and discussion in the Council. As I said to the honourable gentleman, I think we need to strike a sensible balance.

On the second point, perhaps I can let the honourable lady know exactly how this emergency was handled in terms of departmental co-ordination in due course. It is obviously one of the issues that will come out of the investigation. We do regularly review our emergency arrangements and carry out tests of them from time to time. We did so only recently. So I think we are capable of handling emergencies pretty well, although we can always do better.

In this particular case, when I arrived on the scene the Director of Fire Services and the Secretary for Security were both on the spot. There were senior police officers on the spot and of course the District Officer but the actual fire-fighting was under the command of one of the Director of Fire Services' senior deputies. I do not think there was a problem of co-ordination between the various emergency services but I can let the honourable lady have a detailed reply to that in due course.

Mrs Selina Chow (in Chinese): In the past when these disasters occurred, everyone knew that all government departments would do their utmost to rescue people but very often the problem arose out of the issue of co-ordination. I hope that in the upcoming review you will really concentrate on this particular point because, really, we would want very good co-ordination so that there would not be any chaos.

And also, in terms of information dissemination, there'll also be co-ordinated efforts being made so that everyone will feel assured. I hope that in your upcoming review you are going to concentrate on this point because in the past comments have been made.

Governor: Those are important issues that we must look at but can I just say one thing to the honourable lady about information. I think one reason why awareness of the number of fatalities was so limited earlier in the evening was that nobody had provided anything like accurate estimates of those who were missing. It was only, I think, very late that the full figures for those who were missing were brought to our attention.

Another difficulty with accuracy of information is the one I mentioned in my statement - the problems of identification of very badly burnt bodies. But we must learn from our experiences in, of course, the hope that we do not need to deal with these things again but in human society that, alas, is very rarely the case.

Dr Yeung Sum (in Chinese): Thank you, Mr President. Just now a number of Members asked about the fire incident and of course the community is very concerned about it. But now I'd like to change subject.

I want to talk about the performance of the police. Recently there were two incidents. Firstly, I'd like to ask the Governor this; is there a policy that in future when people go to protest at the Japanese Consulate, be they reporters or any members of the public, that it will be limited to a group of 20? If that's the case, would it not stand in the way of reporters covering the incident?

And the second incident; recently there were about 20/30 protesters outside the Convention and Exhibition Centre, but the police actually deployed some 300/400 officers to the scene. I want to know if the Chinese Government ever made a formal request to you to take such a precaution?

And secondly, would you not think that in the whole incident the police over-reacted, because the police actually charged into the crowd leading to some commotion?

Governor: I'd like to take those two points separately and dwell a little longer on the second of them, making as I do so, one or two points which I hope the Council and some outside the Council will take to heart over the coming months, which may be occasionally difficult.

The first question, the Japanese Consulate. Police officers responsible for protecting the Consulate must decide how best to carry out their duties, having regard to the circumstances in the building, for example what's happening there, the physical constraints imposed by the building and the mood of those who are seeking, for instance, to petition in the building. They can't be entirely unmindful of what's happened in that building in the past.

I think, if I may say so, that if members of this Council want this city to retain its international reputation, to retain its links with other communities overseas, then they should be aware of the importance of protecting the consular facilities of other communities here in Hong Kong. I don't wish to relate this comment to conduct by any honourable members, or to any particular incident, but I do think that it's particularly important for those who make the laws to abide by the laws in a full hearted spirit.

Now let me turn to the second of the honourable gentleman's questions. The policing of every event while I'm Governor will be entirely a matter for the Hong Kong police and it will be a matter for the judgement of the Commissioner of Police, operating within the law, operating according to the Bill of Rights, exactly how any operations under his command are carried out. I have not, am not today, and will not give the Commissioner of Police any instructions about how to do his job. We have an outstanding police which is extremely well led and as far as I'm concerned, that is the end of the matter. I wouldn't instruct the Commissioner of Police how to do his job, any more than I would seek to intervene in the affairs of the Attorney General's Department and his independent decisions.

Now let me go on from that. It is the case that before the meeting at the Convention Centre we had representations, as one might have expected, from Chinese officials about the importance of security during the visit to Hong Kong of Mr Qian Qichen and Director Lu Ping. I hope that they will realise that they don't really need to advise us of matters like that. Provided we know when guests are coming, we will do everything possible to look after their security. But it's not surprising that they got in touch with us because exactly the same would have happened if we'd been having the Secretary of State from the United States or the Canadian Prime Minister or other distinguished visitors. They would've got in touch with us as well, but we would of course of said to them you can trust us, you can leave it to us and that's exactly what we say to representations from China.

So any policing of any demonstration over the coming months will be determined by our police, operating under their own command and not being subjected to political influence or political pressure from anyone.

One last point, I very much hope that people in Hong Kong will continue to exercise their freedoms in the mature and responsible way which has characterised expressions of public concern, sometimes public grief, sometimes public anger, over the years. I think that the rest of the world should be impressed by the mature and moderate and restrained and responsible way in which a community which has faced some very substantial issues in the last few years, has discussed those issues and occasionally has protested and demonstrated about those issues.

I hope we can continue to earn that reputation for moderation over the coming months, just as much as I hope passionately that nobody in the future will ever seek to constrain the rights and freedoms which are given people under the Bill of Rights and apparently are given them under the Basic Law.

Dr Yeung Sum (follow-up question in Chinese): Thank you, Mr President. The Governor mentioned the Japanese Consulate. In fact those involved made a public apology afterwards and I think that was appropriate enough. I also agree that the Consulate is a special place. I am sure in future the members of the public would pay more attention to that point.

Just now you mentioned the Bill of Rights and future policing to be the job of the police and you also appealed to the public to remain calm and cool when they engage in demonstrations. But, Mr Governor, I hope you would see this: if there is excessive use of force by the police that also does not bode well for a free society like Hong Kong because we already have the Bill of Rights. So I hope you won't just give a lopsided view. Because I was involved in demonstrations and protests myself and I always knew how to conduct myself but I hope when you look at this issue you will look at both sides of the issue.

The Police have taken a lot of video-tapes of the incident and they have plenty of tapes on that. So, Mr Governor, if there is nothing wrong, fine. But at least try to learn a lesson from that, just like you want to learn a lesson from the way the fire incident was handled just now. I think that is only a fair request. So please go through all the video-tapes taken by the police. If you do not have time ask someone you trust, ask your deputy to look at the tapes. But the way they treated the petitioners, they actually barricaded them and people could not even go to the toilet. There were three layers of police officers. So please take a look at the tapes.

I agree with you that we have the Bill of Rights, we are an open society and we must exercise restraint when we demonstrate but at the same time, I hope you will look at the other side of the coin. I want you to see whether the police overreacted in the case. If not, then it is fine. So would you not take some time to look at those tapes?

Governor: I will certainly consider that suggestion by the honourable gentleman but I do not believe that looking at the tapes would affect what I have said about the Commissioner and the police.

If I can add one point. I greatly respect the dignified way and the eloquent way in which the honourable gentleman makes points about which he feels passionately strongly. And some of those points we share. I think that his leadership should help to ensure the moderation and responsibility which I have mentioned.

I hope that some of those who advise Chinese officials and some of those who seek to do so on a more permanent basis, apparently, will advise Chinese officials on how to encourage moderation and restraint in Hong Kong.

I think some members of this Council are taking curious decisions about how best to convey that advice but I dare say that is a matter which they will be able to live with and their consciences, presumably, will be able to live with.

Mr Tsang Kin-shing (in Chinese): Thank you, Mr President. First of all I would like to praise the Governor, the CS and the Secretary for Security for what they did in the fire rescue operation and also they were there on the scene in order to boost the morale of the rescue personnel and this is something very commendable. In a civilised humane society, officials of the Administration would do just that.

Now I would like to turn to the topic of political development. Mr Governor, in the past few years you have promoted democracy in our election. However, in a forum which is called District Administration 15 year Anniversary, the Director of Home Affairs Department, Madame Lau, said publicly that appointed members actually are very good because they are willing to put in effort, they are willing to put in money. Now we are moving closer and closer to 1997, I would like to know whether the administration is making a change in its direction? It's moving closer towards Beijing and it's trying to bring back the appointment system and turn the clock back?

Governor: No, that's certainly not the administration's policy. When we first proposed to have wholly elected district boards and municipal councils, or pretty well wholly elected, I remember being told that this would produce disasters in the districts and in the City and the New Territories. One of those many disasters which are much advertised as bed-mates of democracy but haven't appeared to show up. I go round the district boards with great regularity and they seem to me to be in extremely good spirits and doing an extremely good job.

As it happens, I was fortunate enough to be able to entertain at lunch yesterday, all the Chairmen of the district boards and we discussed some of their problems with Shelley Lau, who has done a marvellous job in increasing the enthusiasm with which the District Boards work together and promote grass roots representative Government. If the Honourable Member were to look a little to his left, he would see somebody else who was able to share my hospitality yesterday.

And let me add one thing to the Honourable gentleman. I saw Shelley Lau in the middle of last night at the hospital and I saw her this morning having clearly been up all night, and I saw her at the Sha Tin disaster, the fire on the hill, and I've seen her again and again helping the families of the children who were burnt on that occasion and I won't hear a word against Shelley Lau.

Mr Tsang Kin-shing (in Chinese): So the Governor said that Madame Shelley Lau did a lot of service for the fire victims, but that was her job. However, what she said and what she advocated was that the appointed members were wealthy and I'm really worried that after 1997, only wealthy people can be members. Now you have put together an electoral package that is based on one person, one vote. However, one of your subordinates is advocating that. Is it that you are losing power and your subordinates are not listening to you anymore and you cannot direct them anymore? And is it that your subordinates are trying to move closer to the new sovereign power?

Governor: Well, I can't think that if one was trying to move closer to the new sovereign power you would make speeches extolling the democratic credentials of billionaires and millionaires. How would that move you closer to the future sovereign power?

To be serious, I haven't seen Shelley Lau's speech. If she was commending the work that, in the past, was done by many appointed members of district boards then I'd join her in that. If she was commending the work done by appointed members of municipal councils, I would commend her in that. But I'm sure, like me, she recognises the important developments in grassroot democracy which have taken place in the last few years. And as for the suggestion that she was only doing her job, well she was doing her job in a sense, but she happens to be one of those people who does her job 25 hours a day and I'm extremely proud to have her in my team and any Chief Executive after 1997, who has a few Shelley Laus in his team will be equally lucky.

Mr Liu Sing-lee (in Chinese): Mr President, on dangerous slopes, I know the Government has some statistics, so my question is: does the Government have any statistics to show for multi-storey buildings like the Garley Building for instance? Do you have any statistics on such dangerous buildings like the Garley Building or buildings even more dangerous than Garley? Do you have some statistics of this sort so that in future when a bill is passed into law you will be able to target these buildings in your action plan?

Governor: I think, and I believe it is fairly fundamental to the bill, we have statistics and information about the age of buildings and that will help us bring the provisions of the bill into operation in sequence. But I do not think we have comparable statistics to the ones we have on dangerous slopes. But I will look at that and see first of all whether I am right. If not, I will let the honourable gentleman know. Secondly, if I am right I will see whether there is anything we should do about it.

Mr Liu Sing-lee (in Chinese): There are many modern cities in the world with such raging inferno cases and then they always learn from their experience and take remedial measures to prevent a recurrence of similar incidents. So would you take reference of their measures? Although your report will be focused on this incident but would you come up with some comprehensive preventive measure to prevent any more infernos?

Governor: Yes. As I said earlier, we must see what lessons can be learnt from this appalling tragedy and take what measures we can. All of us know that it is impossible in this world to prevent all tragedies but there are some tragedies which society should be able to do more to prevent. There are some tragedies this society should be able to do more to prevent

I very much salute the work that a number of honourable members in this Legislative Council have done, for example, to increase health and safety at the place of work. We are still trying to catch up there with things that perhaps should have been in place a little earlier

As for fire prevention, there is more that we can do, more that we must do, and I hope that the future of this great city will not be marked and marred quite as frequently by tragedies which should be prevented in a civilised, successful, prosperous and decent community

End

Transcript of the Chief Secretary's media session

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The following is the transcript of the media session given by the Chief Secretary, Mrs Anson Chan, after seeing the injured persons and relatives of the deceased at Queen Elizabeth Hospital this (Thursday) morning:

Question: Could you just explain what the latest situation is?

Chief Secretary: First of all, I would say that we all deeply affected by this fire which affected so many people, particularly I would like to extend my sympathy to the deceased families. I have also just been to the scene of the fire to understand the current situation. The Director of Fire Services has now established two working groups, particularly to investigate the reasons for the fire and in particular why the fire spread so very, very quickly and affected so many people. I also just now visit those who have been affected by smoke inhalation or otherwise affected by this fire. Fortunately, the doctors tell me that of the 34 currently in this hospital, 20 can expect to be discharged from hospital by the week's end. There will be only 10 for need to remain for slightly longer. The other 30 who are in Kwang Wah Hospital are fortunately affected to a lesser extend. I hope they will make a very, very speedy recovery. Of course, we will on the basis of the findings, even preliminary findings from the two working groups, we will be in particular wishing to establish what lessons can be learnt from this. I've also been very concerned for those families whose loved ones are currently situation are still unknown. We will be providing relevant information as soon as possible.

Question: Can you explain how in 1996 with Hong Kong as developed city as it is. how a tragedy like this can still happen, while the fire regulations couldn't stop something like this?

Chief Secretary: I have to say I cannot explain this at the moment, but this is clearly an area that we will be following of very quickly and in great depth. We want particularly to know what lessons can be learnt from this, if the law is inadequate. what can be done. We know particularly that this building was a pre-1973 building, that is not caught by existing legislation. So clearly one of the areas that we will be looking at is the need to enforce the statutory conditions, but also whether in the mean time, other steps can be taken to prevent the recurrence of this tragedy

End

Tsim Sha Tsui fire update

The tragic No. 5 alarm fire which has raged for more than 19 hours and resulted in 32 deaths at Garley Building in Tsim Sha Tsui is still ablaze.

As at 12.30 pm today (Thursday), the total number of persons injured is 79. This includes 11 fire officers.

All-out efforts by government departments concerned to take remedial measures to assist victims and their families is now underway.

On the part of the Social Welfare Department, social workers of the department are now liaising closely with their counterparts at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Kwong Wah Hospital to assist those admitted to the hospitals and to follow up with families.

Departmental clinical psychologists will be deployed to provide critical incident stress debriefing at 2.30 pm on Saturday (November 23) at the Henry G. Leong Yau Ma Tei Community Centre to victims and family members affected the the fire. They will follow up with those dsicharged.

Meanwhile, family services centre personnel will reach out to the family members of those deceased and those discharged from hospitals.

Appropriate assistance, such as financial aid in terms of burial grants, charitable funds and CSSA, child care arrangements and counselling, will be offered when necessary.

The department has established links with the Police to ensure information on missing persons be made available to family members. Follow-up actions will be taken by social workers and psychologists.

Affected family members who want to enquire about welfare services may contact the Medical Social Work Unit of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on telephone 2958 7078.

On traffic situation, according to the latest information from the Transport Department, 22 bus routes from Tsim sha Tsui northbound have to re-route via Canton Road; 13 southbound routes to Jordon and China/HK Ferry Terminal via Shanghai Street and Canton Road; and seven westbound routes via Gascogne Road.

Meanwhile, the Home Affairs Department has also mobilised staff of all District Officers to visit families of the deceased and injured, and is in close liaison with the Social Welfare Department, to render every assistance to those in need.

End

Tsim Sha Tsui fire round-up

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The Fire Services Department has set up two special teams to investigate respectively the cause of the No. 5 alarm fire at Garley Building in Tsim Sha Tsui as well as the reasons why it had spread so fast and caused so many casualties.

Speaking at the press conference on the tragedy this (Thursday) afternoon, the Director of Fire Services, Mr Peter Cheung, expressed his deepest sympathy and extended condolences to the families of the fire victims.

The fire was eventually put out at 1.47 pm today after firemen fought the blaze in extremely difficult conditions for more than 21 hours.

Mr Cheung confirmed that, after thorough searches by fire personnel on the whole building, no further casualties were found so far. The death toll of the fire now stands at 39 (comprising 38 people who had been reported missing and the 36-year-old senior fireman Liu Chi Hung, who died during the fire fighting operation).

Over 50 fire engines and some 300 firemen were deployed to combat the blaze with ambulances shuttling more than 100 times between hospitals and the fire scene for taking casualties to hospitals.

Mr Cheung noted that six fire engines were still on standby at the scene to assist in follow-up forensic searches by the Police.

The Police has set up a Disaster Victims Identification Unit and a Casualty Enquiry Unit to help family members of the fire victims to identify the dead bodies and to answer public enquiries.

Appeal to the victims' family members to provide information to facilitate police identification has also been made.

So far, six out of 39 bodies of the fire victims have been identified by family members. The identities of the rest are still unknown.

Up to 4 pm today, more than 630 public enquiries, including 370 on missing persons, were received by the Casualties Enquiry Unit.

The Buildings Department has also set up two special teams to carry out technical investigations on the building.

One team, headed by a Chief Structural Engineer, will identify defects and recommend measures for their removal.

The second team, headed by a Chief Building Surveyor, will carry out a comprehensive investigation into the cause of the tragedy, focusing on the provision of means of escape and the overall building design standards.

According to the Deputy Director of Hospital Authority (Operations), Dr Ko Wing-man, immediately after notified of the fire, the Hospital Authority activated its disaster contingency plan. Two hospitals -- Queen Elizabeth and Kwong Wah Hospital -- were alerted.

Additional medical and nursing staff were deployed to standby in anticipation of the large number of casualties.

At the height of the fire, a mobile medical team was despatched to the scene at 6.15 pm yesterday (Wednesday).

At Queen Elizabeth and Kwong Wah Hospitals, additional clinical psychologists from other hospitals were deployed to counsel patients and relatives.

On post-incident assistance, the Hospital Authority had also liaised with its clinical psychology division, the Hong Kong Psychological Society to arrange hotline service to the public who might require counselling service after witnessing the incident.

Meanwhile, all-out efforts are being made by the government departments concerned to assist the victims and their families.

On the part of the Social Welfare Department, its staff, in conjunction with their counterparts of the Home Affairs Department, have contacted victims admitted to or discharged from the hospitals. Their cases are being followed up immediately by staff of the two departments as well as clinical psychologists, in the respective districts where they live.

Visits will also be paid by staff of the two departments to families whose members have been killed in the fire to offer immediate relief and assistance.

A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing will be held at 2.30 pm on Saturday (November 23) at Henry G. Leong Yau Ma Tei Community Centre by clinical psychologists for anyone who might need help after the psychological trauma.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance will be offered to families which may face financial hardship due to loss of a bread winner in the fire.

In addition, financial assistance is available from emergency relief funds and other charitable resources for the fire victims and their families.

The following hotlines have been set up and are now in operation for enquiries of matters relating to the fire:

	<u>Hotline</u>	<u>Enquiries</u>
Kwong Wah Hospital	2781 5220	casualties of fire
Police's Casualty Enquiry Unit	1878 999	casualties of fire
Police's Disaster Victims Identification Unit	2353 5037	identification of bodies
Labour Department	2852 4036	employees' compensation matters
Medical Social Work Unit of Queen Elizabeth Hospital	2958 7078	welfare services for affected family members
Transport Department	2866 8111	latest traffic diversions and bus services affected
Legal Aid Department	2380 0316	application for legal aid
Urban Services Department	2571 7270 2394 6957	special arrangements for cremation and funeral parlour
Post Office	2928 6230 2928 6239	collection of mail by affected shops, companies and residents of the building

End

Buildings Dept sets up special teams for Yau Ma Tei fire

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The Director of Buildings, Dr Choi Yu-leuk, said today (Thursday) that he has set up two special teams to carry out technical investigations on a Yau Ma Tei building which caught fire yesterday.

While extending his condolences to the relatives of the fire victims, Dr Choi said one team, headed by a chief structural engineer, would identify defects and recommend measures for their removal.

The second team, headed by a chief building surveyor, will carry out a comprehensive investigation into the cause of the tragedy, focusing on the provision of means of escape and the overall building design standards.

The occupation permit of the affected commercial building was issued in December 1975. It has 16 floors and a basement.

Dr Choi said his department had been keeping under review the need for improvements in the administrative and enforcement practices with a view to further enhancing fire safety in private buildings.

"To provide a more strengthened and detailed fire protection approach for new buildings, we have in the last two years completely revised and updated the Code of Practice (COP) for Means of Escape, the COP for Fire Resisting Construction and the COP for Means of Access.

"The three COPs provide a better fire protection assurance to the building owners and occupants, as well as the general public," Dr Choi said.

Regarding the Fire Safety (Commercial Premises) Bill, which is being scrutinised by a Bills Committee of the Legislative Council, Dr Choi said the proposed legislation was a very important safeguard against fire.

"We are aware that certain commercial premises, especially those of 20 to 30 years old, fall short of present-day standards.

"The Bill seeks to remedy the shortfall. If endorsed by the Legislative Council, the Bill will make it easier for us to ensure adequate protection of life and property against fire. Public safety is our prime concern," Dr Choi said.

End

Labour Department to offer assistance to fire victims

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The Commissioner for Labour, Miss Jacqueline Willis, expressed her deep concern and condolences to the families of the deceased in the No. 5 Alarm fire in Tsim Sha Tsui.

The Labour Department has set up a hotline to answer enquiries on employees' compensation matters from relatives and friends of those employees who were injured or killed in the fire.

The hotline number is 2852 4036 and operates from 9 am to 5.30 pm.

Two teams of labour officers from the Employees' Compensation Division went to Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Kwong Wah Hospital this (Thursday) morning to offer assistance to relatives of the deceased employees and other employees who were injured in the fire.

Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, injured employees and dependants of deceased employees are entitled to employees' compensation.

The maximum amount of compensation for an employee who is killed in a work related accident is \$1,512,000 or 84 months' pay and for those suffering permanent incapacity is \$1,728,000 or 96 months' pay whichever is the less.

End

JLG reaches agreement on HK-Japan Air Services Agreement

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The British and Chinese sides of the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group (JLG) reached agreement on the initialled text of the Air Services Agreement between Hong Kong and Japan on November 20, 1996.

The two sides agree that the Hong Kong Government shall under due authorisation formally sign the agreement with its Japanese counterpart.

End

Localisation of UK enactments on Carriage by Air

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The Carriage by Air Bill with the objective to ensure the continuation of the current civil aviation regime in Hong Kong will be gazetted tomorrow (Friday).

A Government spokesman said: "At present, carriage by air is governed by UK enactments which have been applied to Hong Kong by two UK Orders in Council made in 1967. These UK enactments give effect to three international agreements (namely, the Warsaw Convention, the Hague Protocol and the Guadalajara Convention) which govern international carriage by air and apply similar provisions to non-international carriage by air and carriage of mail and postal packages.

"Among other things, they set out the liability limits of air carriers in respect of death or injury of passengers or damage to baggage or cargo, specify the persons who are eligible to lodge a claim against the carriers, set the time limit for bringing proceedings against carriers and specify which States have jurisdiction over cases."

The spokesman noted: "The Bill, if enacted, will localise relevant UK carriage by air enactments to ensure the continued application of the three international agreements governing carriage by air and similar provisions relating to non-international carriage by air and the carriage of mail and postal packages to the HKSAR after June 1997. The localisation proposals have been agreed in the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group.

"The localization of the relevant UK enactments on carriage by air will preserve the current statutory framework on carriage by air in Hong Kong for post 1997." he added.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council on December 4, 1996.

End

Consumer price indices for October released

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Consumer price inflation remained moderate. As measured by the Consumer Price Index (A), the year-on-year rate of increase was 5.4% in October 1996. This was only slightly higher than the 5.2% increase recorded in September.

The year-on-year rate of increase in the Consumer Price Index (B) at 5.8% in October, was slightly slower than the 5.9% increase in September. The corresponding rate of increase in the Hang Seng CPI was 6.0% in October, which was higher than the 5.6% increase in September.

The Composite CPI, which is compiled based on the combined expenditure pattern of all households, showed a year-on-year increase of 5.7% in October 1996, against 5.6% in September.

The Census and Statistics Department today (Thursday) released the Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures for October 1996.

A Government spokesman said that the slightly faster year-on-year increase in the CPI(A) in October than in September was partly due to faster increases in the prices of fuel and light (caused by the rise in electricity charges), alcoholic drinks and tobacco, some basic food items as well as some consumer goods.

The slower increase in the CPI(B) in October than in September was mainly due to continued easing in private housing rentals.

As for the Hang Seng CPI, the faster increase in October than in September was mainly due to a faster increase in the prices of outerclothing.

Analysed by component, faster year-on-year increases than the overall average in October were recorded for clothing and footwear (10.6% in CPI(A) and 9.4% in Composite CPI); housing (8.2% in CPI(A) and 8.6% in Composite CPI); miscellaneous services (7.1% in CPI(A) and 6.4% in Composite CPI); fuel and light (6.3% in CPI(A) and 6.4% in Composite CPI); alcoholic drinks and tobacco (6.3% in CPI(A) and 6.2% in Composite CPI) and transport (6.1% in CPI(A) and 5.8% in Composite CPI).

Meanwhile, those components with slower year-on-year increases in prices than the overall average were food (excluding meals bought away from home) (1.4% in CPI(A) and 1.7% in Composite CPI); durable goods (1.5% in CPI(A) and 1.6% in Composite CPI); meals bought away from home (3.4% in CPI(A) and 3.2% in Composite CPI) and miscellaneous goods (4.6% in CPI(A) and 3.9% in Composite CPI).

Comparing October 1996 with September 1996, the CPI(A) and CPI(B) increased by 0.3% and 0.7% respectively. The corresponding increases for the Hang Seng CPI and Composite CPI were 1.1% and 0.7% respectively.

Taking the first ten months of 1996 together, the increases in the CPI(A) and CPI(B) averaged at 5.9% and 6.4% respectively over a year earlier. The corresponding increases in the Hang Seng CPI and Composite CPI were 6.6% and 6.3% respectively.

For the three months ended October 1996, the CPI(A) and CPI(B) were, on average, higher by 5.2% and 5.7% respectively over a year earlier. The corresponding increases for the Hang Seng CPI and Composite CPI were 5.8% and 5.6% respectively.

For the 12 months ended October 1996, the CPI(A) and CPI(B) were, on average, higher by 6.1% and 6.6% respectively than the preceding 12-month period. The corresponding increases for the Hang Seng CPI and Composite CPI were 6.8% and 6.5% respectively.

The seasonally adjusted monthly rates of increase in the CPI(A) and CPI(B) averaged at 0.4% and 0.6% respectively during the three months ended October 1996. The corresponding increases for the Hang Seng CPI and Composite CPI were 0.6% and 0.5% respectively.

Further details are shown in Tables 1-2 and Charts 1-4.

More details are given in the Consumer Price Index Report for October 1996, which is available at \$37.0 per copy from the Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, Low Block, ground floor, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong; or from the Publications Unit of the Census and Statistics Department, 19th floor, Wanchai Tower, 12 Harbour Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong. For local and overseas mailings, contact should be made with the Information Services Department, 28th floor, Siu On Centre, 188 Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

For enquiries about the indices, please telephone the Consumer Price Index Section of the Census and Statistics Department on 2805 6403.

Table 1 Consumer Price Indices and Rates of Increase for October 1996
(Oct. 94 - Sep. 95 = 100)

Component	CPI(A)		CPI(B)		Hang Seng CPI		Composite CPI	
	Index for Oct. 96	% change over Oct. 95	Index for Oct. 96	% change over Oct. 95	Index for Oct. 96	% change over Oct. 95	Index for Oct. 96	% change over Oct. 95
Food	105.8	+2.5	105.9	+2.6	105.3	+2.8	105.8	+2.6
Meals bought away from home	106.7	+3.4	106.3	+3.1	105.2	+3.0	106.3	+3.2
Food, excluding meals bought away from home	104.6	+1.4	105.2	+1.9	105.7	+2.3	105.0	+1.7
Housing	114.8	+8.2	115.4	+8.3	117.6	+9.4	116.0	+8.6
Fuel and light	108.1	+6.3	107.9	+6.3	108.6	+6.9	108.1	+6.4
Alcoholic drinks and tobacco	109.4	+6.3	109.8	+6.4	109.3	+5.9	109.5	+6.2
Clothing and footwear	118.7	+10.6	120.1	+11.4	112.8	+5.7	117.4	+9.4
Durable goods	104.1	+1.5	104.5	+2.0	104.4	+1.2	104.4	+1.6
Miscellaneous goods	108.4	+4.6	107.1	+4.0	105.7	+3.0	107.1	+3.9
Transport	109.8	+6.1	109.4	+5.8	108.4	+5.5	109.2	+5.8
Miscellaneous services	112.8	+7.1	111.6	+6.8	108.9	+5.5	111.0	+6.4
All items	109.9	+5.4	110.6	+5.8	110.9	+6.0	110.5	+5.7

Monthly consumer price indices are compiled on the basis of (a) expenditure patterns of relevant households and (b) prices collected currently in the month. The expenditure patterns underlying the 1994/95-based consumer price indices are based on those patterns derived from the 1994/95 Household Expenditure Survey. The CPI(A) is based on the expenditure pattern of about 50% of households in Hong Kong, which had an average monthly expenditure of \$4,000-\$15,999 in 1994/95. The CPI(B) is based on the expenditure pattern of the next 30% of households, which had an average monthly expenditure of \$16,000-\$29,999 in 1994/95. The Hang Seng CPI is based on the expenditure pattern of the next 10% of households, which had an average monthly expenditure of \$30,000-\$59,999 in 1994/95.

Whereas the CPI(A), CPI(B) and Hang Seng CPI are based on the expenditure patterns of groups of households with different magnitudes of household expenditure, the Composite CPI is compiled based on the expenditure pattern of all these households taken together. Thus, while the CPI(A), CPI(B) and Hang Seng CPI show the impact of consumer price changes on different groups of households, the Composite CPI shows the impact of consumer price changes on the household sector generally.

Table 2 Consumer Price Indices and Year-on-year Rates of Change for
October 1995 - October 1996
(Oct. 94 - Sep. 95 = 100)

<u>Year/month</u>		<u>CPI(A)</u>		<u>CPI(B)</u>		<u>Hang Seng CPI</u>		<u>Composite CPI</u>	
		<u>Index</u>	<u>Year-on-year rate of change (%)</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Year-on-year rate of change (%)</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Year-on-year rate of change (%)</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Year-on-year rate of change (%)</u>
1995	October	104.3	8.0	104.5	8.4	104.7	8.7	104.5	8.4
	November	104.3	7.8	104.7	8.1	105.4	8.2	104.7	8.1
	December	103.9	6.4	104.6	7.2	104.9	7.2	104.5	7.0
1996	January	104.1	5.8	104.8	6.6	105.1	7.3	104.7	6.5
	February	105.4	6.4	105.9	7.0	105.7	7.5	105.7	6.9
	March	106.1	6.5	106.4	7.0	106.3	7.5	106.3	7.0
	April	107.3	6.8	107.8	7.0	107.5	7.1	107.6	7.0
	May	107.1	6.1	107.9	6.6	108.5	6.9	107.8	6.5
	June	107.8	6.1	108.3	6.4	109.1	6.6	108.4	6.4
	July	108.0	6.1	108.5	6.4	108.6	6.2	108.4	6.2
	August	108.2	4.9	108.7	5.5	108.9	5.9	108.6	5.4
	September	109.6	5.2	109.9	5.9	109.7	5.6	109.7	5.6
	October	109.9	5.4	110.6	5.8	110.9	6.0	110.5	5.7

Chart 1 Year-on-year Rates of Increase
in CPI(A)

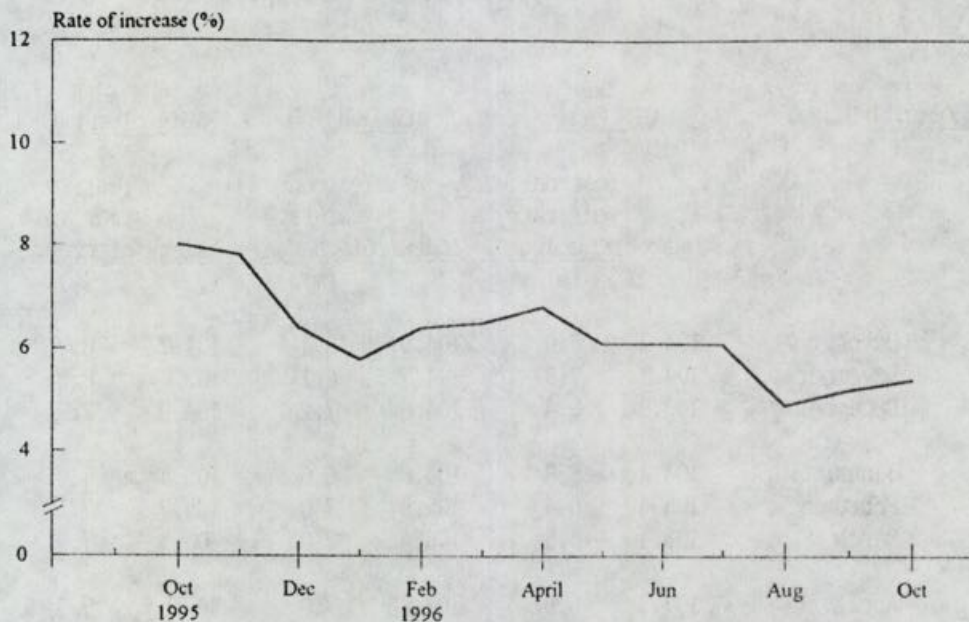


Chart 2 Year-on-year Rates of Increase
in CPI(B)

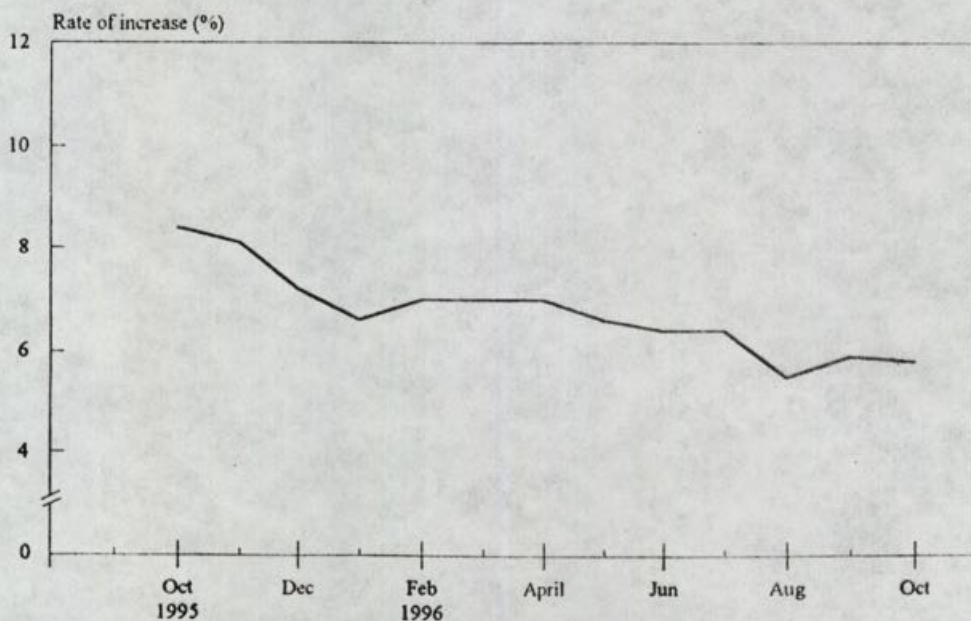


Chart 3 Year-on-year Rates of Increase
in Hang Seng CPI

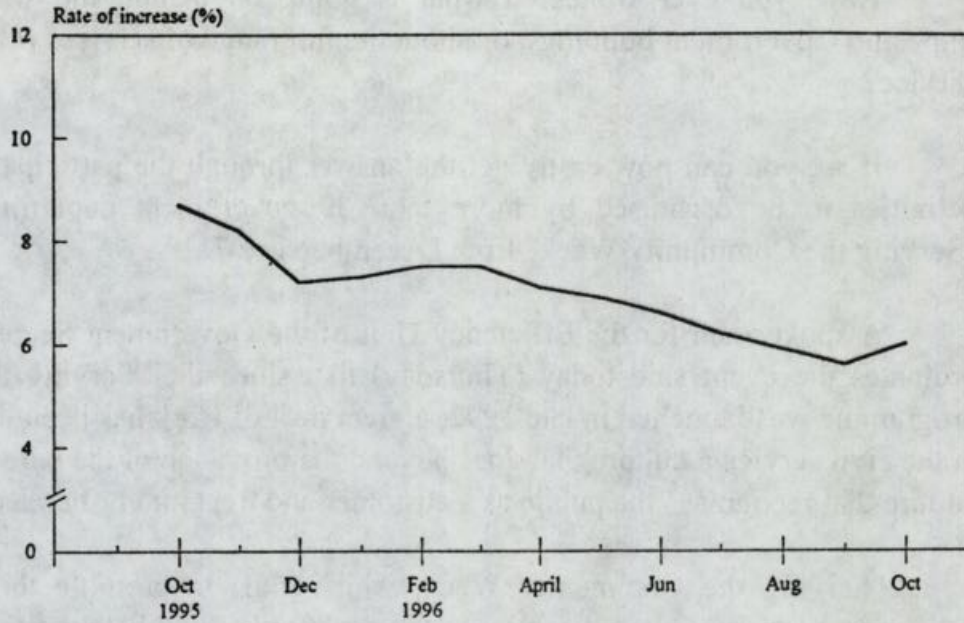
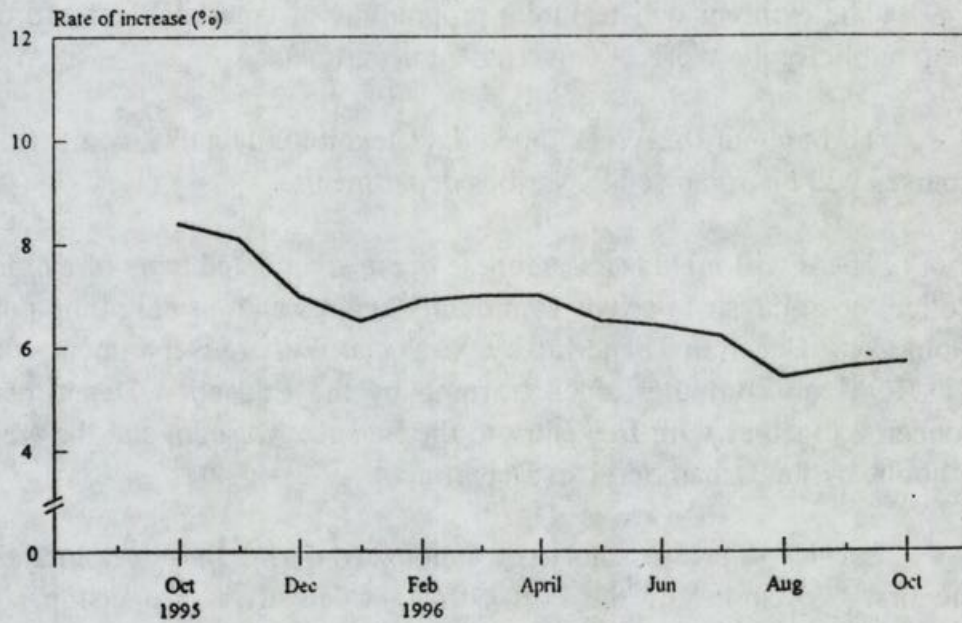


Chart 4 Year-on-year Rates of Increase
in Composite CPI



Week to show what government does for you

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Have you ever wondered what is going on behind the walls of all those imposing Government buildings, or about the full range of services offered by the civil service?

If so, you can now easily get the answer through the participation in over 100 activities to be organised by more than 50 government departments during the "Serving the Community Week" from December 1 to 7.

A spokesman for the Efficiency Unit of the Government Secretariat which co-ordinates the event said today (Thursday) that since the "Serving the Community" programme was launched in late 1992, a great deal of work has been done to engender in the civil service a culture that goes beyond the provision of the bare minimum, i.e. a culture that recognises the public as a customer and treat him or her accordingly.

"Serving the Community Week, which aims to promote the importance of delivering good quality civil service to the community, will help publicise the message further," she added.

The Week starts off with a carnival at Fa Hui Park on December 1, to be officially opened by the Financial Secretary, Mr Donald Tsang, and all his Policy Secretaries colleagues.

The carnival will feature a programme of entertainment and 60 game stalls to help publicise the work of Government departments.

Throughout the Week, open days, exhibitions, talks, competitions and training courses will be organised by various departments.

These will include a Cantonese opera and guided tours of a police station by the Police; open days of various community centres and a sand piling competition on the Gold Coast Beach in Tuen Mun by the Social Welfare Department; the launching of a CD-ROM on computer aided learning by the Education Department; and special concerts, together with free entry to the Science Museum and the Museum of Art for schools, by the Urban Services Department.

Service improvements to be announced during the Week include the opening of the first "Postshop" by the Post Office, which offers a one-stop shop for all post-related things, such as cards, wrapping paper etc.

In addition, the Education Department, the Transport Department and the Independent Commission Against Corruption will all be making new Performance Pledges on the standards of service their customers can expect - covering matters as diverse as services to children newly arrived from China to the level of pollution in our road tunnels.

Serving the Community Week is certainly the first of its kind in Hong Kong, and probably the first in the world. "Its success will depend on the support of the public at large and all civil servants, including their families and friends," the spokesman stressed.

Copies of the full programme of events are available from District Offices. Those who are interested can also call the Serving the Community Week Hotline on 2810 2216, or access to the Hong Kong Government Information Centre web site on the Internet at <http://www.info.gov.hk>.

End

Some 50 officers attend workshop on Ramsar Site conservation

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Some 50 officers from various government departments are expected to gain better understanding on the conservation of Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site by taking part in a workshop held today (Thursday).

This one-day workshop was organised with the main aim of increasing awareness and knowledge of relevant government staff, who will be involved in the implementation of the conservation strategy and management plan of the site.

It would also facilitate the exchange of information on Ramsar issues, international co-operation and the needs for intersectoral planning.

In his welcoming address this morning, the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries, Dr Lawrence Lee, stressed that the listing of Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (Ramsar Site) in September 1995 meant that Hong Kong had taken upon itself the obligations to comply with the requirements under the convention.

"These include the formulation and implementation of a planning strategy to promote the conservation of the wetlands within the territory and the development of a management plan and the provision of adequate wardening for the Ramsar Site," he said.

He added that the Agriculture and Fisheries Department (AFD) had commissioned a nine-month consultancy study in May to develop a conservation strategy and management plan for the site.

"The purpose of this workshop, being part of the study, is to promote a better understanding amongst ourselves of the conservation of the Ramsar Site and to provide opportunities for participants to share experience and discuss ideas," he said.

Dr Lee also thanked the counterpart departments of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Ramsar Bureau, Wetlands International, World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong (WWFHK) and the department's consultant for their contribution to the workshop.

Major presenters of the function included Director General of the Ministry of Forestry, PRC, Mr Zhen Rende; Ramsar Bureau Senior Policy Advisor, Mr Mike Smart; Wetlands International Technical Programme Director, Mr Mike Ounsted, coordinators Mr Chen Kelin and Dr Taej Mundkur, WWFHK Executive Director, Mr David Melville and an AFD assistant director Mr Frank Lau.

They gave talks on objectives of the Ramsar Convention, the implementation of the convention and related issues, the Ramsar Strategic Plan and relevant recommendations, as well as co-operation with Chinese authorities and agencies.

These were followed by discussion sessions which allowed participants to discuss issues related to the Site informally.

End

Transfer of VMs from Whitehead Detention Centre today

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A group of about 1,130 Vietnamese migrants will be transferred from Sections 4 and 6 of Whitehead Detention Centre (WHDC) to the Security Unit of WHDC and Victoria Prison today (Thursday) in preparation for their return to Vietnam under the Orderly Repatriation Programme.

They will go through pre-flight documentation and medical checks prior to their repatriation on November 25 and 28, and on December 3, 6, 10 and 13.

The transfer will be observed by independent monitors.

End

District school liaison committee to inaugurate

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The Yau Tsim Mong District Officer, Mr Bart Ireland, will officiate at the inauguration ceremony of Yau Tsim Mong District School Liaison Committee and Logo Design/Colouring Competition prize-presentation ceremony tomorrow (Friday).

The Yau Tsim Mong District School Liaison Committee was established in September by merging the Yau Tsim School Liaison Committee and the Mong Kok District School Liaison Committee. The 71 members are all incumbent headmasters of registered kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the district.

The committee is aimed at enhancing inter-school relations through community activities. It also maintains close relationship with the District Board and government departments to help promote better understanding.

Twelve winners of the Logo Design/Colouring Competition will be awarded certificates and prizes for their outstanding works.

The inauguration and prize presentation ceremony is sponsored by Yau Tsim Mong District Board. Also officiating at the ceremony will be the Chairman of the Yau Tsim Mong District Board, Mr Chow Chun-fai and a Principal Education Officer, Mr Poon Chung-shing, of the Education Department.

End

November issue of Monthly Digest of Statistics now on sale

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Two feature articles entitled "Statistics on job vacancies for June 1995 to June 1996" and "Involvement of juveniles and young persons in crime" are published in the November 1996 issue of the Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics, which is now on sale.

The article "Statistics on job vacancies for June 1995 to June 1996" presents statistics on job vacancies for June 1995 to June 1996, analysed by major industry sector and by broad level of occupation and skill.

A brief account of the general survey methodology in relation to the collection of data on detailed characteristics of job vacancies is also given.

According to the statistics shown in the article, the total number of job vacancies in the major industry sectors of Hong Kong decreased from some 52,000 to 48,000 between June 1995 and June 1996.

These vacancies were mainly concentrated in the wholesale, retail and import/export trades, restaurants and hotels sector, followed by the financing, insurance, real estate and business services sector; the community, social and personal services sector; and the manufacturing sector.

Analysed by major occupation group, "clerks" and "service workers and shop sales workers" were the groups with the largest number of vacancies, while the group "managers and administrators" had the smallest number of vacancies.

The causes of crimes committed by juveniles and young persons have always been a subject of concern to the community. The article "Involvement of juveniles and young persons in crime" aims to give an overview of crimes committed by these people in the past seven years based on data collected by the Royal Hong Kong Police Force through the Integrated Law and Order Statistical System.

"Juveniles" refer to persons who are aged between 7 and 15 and "young persons" refer to those aged between 16 and 20. Various characteristics of these offenders, such as age, sex, type of offence committed and triad affiliation, are analysed.

The Police Superintendents' Discretion Scheme, which allows offenders under the age of 18 to be cautioned for certain minor offences rather than being prosecuted, is also discussed.

The November 1996 issue of the Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics is now on sale at \$50 a copy. Apart from the above two feature articles, it contains the most up-to-date information on Hong Kong's development regarding economic growth, labour market, inflation and many other social and economic issues.

Purchase of the publication can be made at the Government Publications Centre, ground floor, Low Block, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong. The publication is also available for sale at the Publications Unit of the Census and Statistics Department, 19th floor, Wanchai Tower, 12 Harbour Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

Regular subscription can also be arranged with the Publications (Sales) Office of the Information Services Department on 2598 8196.

End

Garrison to open gates to public for the last time

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Ships, helicopters and assault craft will feature in spectacular action displays when the Royal Navy and the territory's own soldiers, the Hong Kong Military Service Corps (HKMSC) open the gates of Stonecutters Island to the public this weekend.

On what will be the last Open Days held by the British Garrison, the two branches of the Armed Services will be mounting a weekend-long programme packed with events on Saturday (November 23) and Sunday (November 24).

Highlights of the weekend will include action displays in the basin of HMS Tamar and a full programme of arena demonstrations by the Motorcycle Display Team from 29 Transport Squadron, Royal Logistic Corps, the Dog Display Team from the Hong Kong Defence Animal Support Unit together with traditional lion and dragon dances.

Music throughout the weekend will be provided by the Band of the Brigade of the Gurkhas and the Corps of Drums from 1st Battalion, The Staffordshire Regiment.

The final Garrison Open Days are being staged to raise money for the Locally Enlisted Personnel Trust, the charity established by the British Forces to provide funds for Hong Kong Chinese ex-members of the Garrison who may find themselves in need of assistance after 1997. The two-day event will also allow the public access to various units of the military and demonstrate how the Garrison operates.

Also open to the public will be a variety of souvenir shops, games stall and military displays, some of which will provide opportunities for visitors to view and handle selected items of military equipment.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

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	<u>\$million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	2,847	0930	+52
Closing balance in the account	2,899	1000	+52
Change attributable to:		1100	+52
Money market activity	+52	1200	+50
LAF today	NIL	1500	+30
		1600	+52

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 124.2 *-0.1* 21.11.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes/MTRC notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.95	2 years	2811	5.72	100.18	5.70
1 month	4.91	3 years	3910	6.28	100.83	6.05
3 months	4.89	5 years	5109	7.32	103.38	6.59
6 months	4.97	7 years	7308	7.24	102.54	6.88
12 months	5.21	10 years	1610	7.37	102.52	7.14
		5 years	M503	7.35	102.13	6.93

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$12,624 million

Closed November 21, 1996

End