



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Text of the Governor's broadcast on RTHK's "Letter From Hong Kong"

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The Last Letter from Hong Kong:

The Last Letter from Hong Kong. It sounds a bit final doesn't it. The final curtain. The last hurrah. Well, relax. It doesn't presage the terminal collapse of literacy. Nor the closure of the Post Office. And it certainly isn't a hint that the official censor is coming to town. All that's happened is that RTHK is changing the format of this regular look at Hong Kong. So the envelope closes on one sheaf of letters. And, hey presto, more - not quite the same, but similar - more letters are promised in a future post.

These letters have been dropping through RTHK's post box for 15 years. Personal views, on every subject. No prejudice un-turned. No opinion censored. Government attacked. Government praised - well, not all that often praised! Democracy applauded. Democracy rubbished. I've heard - usually while I'm shaving on a Sunday morning - views on sexism, views on environmentalism, views on communism. Every "ism" under the sun has had its day. Every "ism" and some "was'isms". 15 years of "I told you so", and "why are they all so crazy?", and "it's a monstrous outrage". And, from time to time, 15 years of "isn't Hong Kong a great place?".

Yes, it is. And one reason is - in a sense - shown by a decade and a half of these letters: the best possible reflection of a free society in which no one is afraid to say what they think. Free speech. Not just for some, depending on your political affiliation or the size of your bank deposit. And not just free speech in the privacy of your own home, curtains drawn and lights out. But free speech for everyone. Free speech out in the open. And free shouting, too, if you want. Freedom to say what you want, when you want, and on a government owned radio station too. Free speech - the high octane of a free society.

I first visited Hong Kong as a young-ish backbench Member of Parliament just before these programmes started. I remember the buzz I got on that first trip in 1979. Like the shot of adrenalin when I made my first visit as a student to New York and America. The feeling of "oomph" -pazz, the Americans would say. A community which throbs with vitality. Free to breathe. Free to get on with its life. Believing in progress. Believing that you can make things better yourself. Make life better for yourself, your family, your community. That you can make a difference. That you can pull yourself up through your own efforts.

I felt exactly the same sense of energy and drive, mostly harnessed to a decent cause, when I arrived as Governor nearly three years ago. Back in those days, the West Kowloon reclamation had hardly begun. There was no mighty bridge at Tsing Ma, just designs on a drawing board. No airport growing up out of the sea off the northern Lantau coast. No Western Crossing starting to tunnel below the waters of our great harbour.

Nor for that matter had we in those days started to address, started but far from finished, the task of giving the disabled a decent deal - in the office, the factory, the home, on the buses and the trains, in hostels and training centres. We had less generous welfare provision than we've got today. Taxes were higher. Inflation was above today's level, too. And crime was higher, as a matter of fact. What was just the same, exactly the same, was the throbbing market economy - in a gloomy world, an economy with a smile. And, most of the time, an economy with a heart as well. And so it should have. In a civilised and decent society, the better-off help those in need. That's a duty, and in a way a privilege. A duty and a privilege in Hong Kong, just like everywhere else.

But unlike a lot of other places, Hong Kong doesn't suffer from some of the mortal sins that impoverish other societies, impoverish them morally, and economically as well in due course. There's a bit of corruption. But not much, and we crack down on corruption very hard wherever we find it. And the international view is that we've got just about the cleanest procedures for handing out government business and handing out government contracts in the world. We don't suffer from over-government. Too much red tape, maybe, from time to time, but according to business magazines and think-tanks, this is just about the most business-friendly place in the world.

There's another virtue which I think we should celebrate. We don't allow envy to masquerade as economic policy. I'm sure you know what I mean. We're not jealous of others who get on, make a fortune, buy a big car. Class-war isn't the root of our politics, thank heavens.

But naturally we do have political arguments. Is that un-Hong Kong, un-Asian? Well, hardly. I think it's rather patronising when people suggest that Hong Kong families aren't really interested in politics, in their futures, in helping to shape their own lives. That tends to be an excuse for not wanting to listen to what Hong Kong people have to say. If you don't want to listen to the answer, pretend that no one is interested in the question.

Truth to tell, people in Hong Kong - better-off, better-travelled, better-educated - are just as interested in politics as anyone else. Which is to say that it doesn't dominate their lives, but they don't want to be ignored, taken for granted, taken for fools, taken for a ride, consumers of goods but never of ideas. You don't need to be a Marxist to know that that's twaddle.

Hong Kong's political life has developed. It's developed even in the last 3 years, with the government becoming more open and more accountable. Steps along a promised road. And have those steps led to Hong Kong's ruination? Look around. We're better-off than ever. Our finances are - if you look at the books - as prudently managed as they've always been. Our taxes, as I said, are lower. Our reserves are higher. A more open Hong Kong isn't poorer. And it's not less stable. It's richer and it's more strongly based.

The surprise for me, it should be a surprise for anyone who looks further than the tip of the bonnet on their Mercedes, is that politics in Hong Kong is so blessedly moderate. Hong Kong has lived on the foothills of great events for 50 years. And we rush towards 1997, a momentous year though one that I'm sure Hong Kong will take in its stride. But still the debate, the dialogue, is usually civil and restrained. Nothing to get in a nervous flap about - a mark of Hong Kong's maturity and sense.

Back to that momentous year. Is 1997 going to change Hong Kong? Will all these qualities that I'm always talking about go overboard, into the harbour - cleaner, I hope, by then - in one big splash? I'm asked that question more than any other. And I usually give a pretty conventional answer.

I talk about the Joint Declaration.

I talk about geese and golden eggs: I'm sure you know that one.

I talk about "face", rather as a distinguished member of China's politburo did the other day.

I talk about the innate strength of the values that make Hong Kong special.

And I talk about the rule of law.

There's not an argument, I guess, with which you're not familiar, not an argument you haven't inspected, weighed up, pronounced on.

But let me tell you the argument I feel most strongly. Feel in my bones.

Hong Kong will change in 1997. It's bound to change in some respects. It's a largely Chinese city, with an international outlook, which the chance of history made a British colony. The last major British colony. And come 1997 it's a Chinese city in China, albeit with its special qualities preserved and guaranteed.

But, I don't think Hong Kong will change fundamentally if the men and women who live here don't want it to change. Fatalism, thinking there's nothing you can do, expecting the worst, is self-fulfilling. Things don't have to change for the worst and I don't believe they will. And that's a reason for not being pessimistic, for not throwing in the towel.

Now, it's not a cop-out for me to say these things. I have to do all I can before midnight on 30 June two years hence to give Hong Kong under Chinese sovereignty the best chance of continuing to thrive, to succeed, to hit the record books.

But much, most, depends on Hong Kong.

If people want our freedoms to survive they won't offer Faustian deals which imply that provided one can go on making money, none of this stuff about freedom and the rule of law really matters. That sort of attitude shows a non-existent sense of morality and, arguably, a very short-sighted grasp of how to go on doing good business.

If people like newspapers, radio stations and television channels which will tell them pretty openly what's happening here and in the rest of the world then it's up to them to make that clear. Self-censorship is especially corrosive. And it's unnecessary. Journalists, editors, proprietors, shouldn't take the scissors to their own work when no one else would dare to do so.

If Hong Kong wants its government to go on doing business on the basis of who offered the best deal, not whose name is on the note-paper, then we musn't collude at infringements of this vital principle.

If people believe in themselves and their values, they really will survive. Thinking and expecting the worst can, as I've said, be unpleasantly self-fulfilling. Do you remember that old advertisement for self-development courses - "Be positive"? Well, it's not a bad slogan for us. Be positive and act positive, too.

So I think there is every reason to be cheerful when we look to the horizon. We should know that we can all, individually, make our mark. This great city was built up, created, in circumstances far from ideal. The citizens of this territory can keep Hong Kong great. They - you - can make a difference. We should believe the best of ourselves and expect and demand the best of China. I think China will respond. Will want to respond. So when I get asked after 1997, to write a letter to Hong Kong, still with its freedom of speech and still able to entertain every point of view, I believe that I'll still be addressing a free, prosperous, decent society, living with the rule of law - under a Chinese flag.

If the people of Hong Kong believe that, too, and want it to happen, it will. Because Hong Kong is a taste of the future not a left-over from the past. That is Hong Kong's achievement; no one can take it away.

End/Sunday, April 2, 1995

Postal system contract for new airport awarded

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The Postmaster General, Mr M Pagliari, announced today that the contract for the provision and installation of a Postal Mechanization System (PMS) for the New Air Mail Centre at Chek Lap Kok Airport had been awarded to AEG Electrocom GmbH of Germany on April 1, 1995, at a cost of \$187 million.

This is one of the government contracts awarded on the Airport Core Programme (ACP) for the new airport.

The Hong Kong Post Office is one of the biggest postal administrations in the world in terms of international mail volume, and ranks third in the world in terms of the volume of EMS (Speedpost) traffic handled. Airmail traffic, in particular, has been growing rapidly. For airmail letters and packets alone, a total of 135 million items were sent and 79 million items received in 1994, representing an overall increase of 11.7% over the previous year.

The PMS, which incorporates state-of-the-art technology in postal mechanisation, will serve to maintain the high quality of the airmail service in the face of the ever growing traffic and to achieve greater operational efficiency. The system consists of the most modern sorting equipment in the world for letters, packets, parcels and Speedpost items, a dedicated storage and retrieval system for mailbags and airline containers, as well as a comprehensive mail conveyance system.

The letter sorting equipment will continue the present system which Hong Kong was the first in the world to adopt for machine-reading and sorting letters without the necessity of postcodes or zip codes. It will comprise a unit of Culler-Facer-Canceller for facing and datestamping letters, two Optical Character Recognition (OCR) units with on-line and off-line video coding facilities, two Letter Sorting units and an automatic letter-bundle wrapping unit. The Culler-Facer-Canceller, the OCR and Letter Sorting units can process about 30,000 letters per machine-hour.

There will also be two Packet Sorting Machines and one Parcel Sorting Machine. Their hourly output will be 10,000 and 6,000 items per machine respectively. The Packet Sorting Machines will be the first equipment of its kind to be introduced in Hong Kong for processing airmail packets, the volume of which has been increasing every year. The machine output is about four times that of the existing manual sorting system.

The storage and retrieval system is designed to suit both mail bags and airline containers. Nowadays more and more advanced postal administrators are moving away from use of the conventional mail bags in favour of despatching mail in airline containers. Airline containers are larger than conventional mail bags and they can accommodate mail in loose form. The use of containers will therefore speed up the processing of mail resulting in higher quality of service accorded to the mail. The provision of such facility at the New Air Mail Centre will bring Hong Kong in line with the advanced mail handling systems of other major postal administrations.

The provision of the Postal Mechanisation System will fully mechanise the airmail operation at the New Air Mail Centre. It will be a major milestone in the history of the Hong Kong Post Office.

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Volunteers wanted for rehabilitation of offenders

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The Social Welfare Department is looking for volunteers to help with the rehabilitation of offenders.

People, aged 21 or above, with secondary school education, mature personality and an interest in the rehabilitation of offenders, are invited to join the Volunteer Scheme for Probationers (VSP).

A Social Welfare Department spokesman today (Sunday) said the scheme aimed to promote interest and concern of the public towards helping and rehabilitating offenders and by so doing bring greater community involvement and stronger community action against crime.

"It also helps to meet the specific need of suitable probationers through service offered by volunteers and complement the efforts of probation officers in the social rehabilitation of probationers," he added.

The period of service is normally six months, but the volunteer may serve for further terms for the same or other offenders.

"Selected volunteers will be given a thorough briefing before they start to assist the probation officers by befriending, helping and advising probationers on a personal basis," the spokesman said.

Former volunteers of the scheme are welcome to apply again.

Application forms are now available at the centre for VSP on the seventh floor, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road east, Wan Chai, probation offices attached to the magistracies, community centres as well as children and youth centres.

Completed forms should be returned to one of the above centres on or before May 5. Enquiries about the scheme can be made on tel 2892 5117.

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TDD forms Safety Advisory Unit

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The Territory Development Department (TDD) has set up a Safety Advisory Unit to enhance construction site safety for the department's projects.

The main responsibilities of the unit, which is headed by a Safety Advisor of senior engineer rank, was to promote awareness of construction site safety among TDD staff, consultants, contractors and workers in accordance with Government policies, the department's Director Mr Lee Shing- see said today (Sunday).

"The unit also assists in policy formulation and implementation in relation to construction safety, as well as monitoring safety measures, including site inspection and to recommend further improvement," he noted.

The Safety Advisor will provide assistance and advice to TDD's project engineers in the Development Offices and resident site staff on all matters relating to construction site safety.

Meanwhile, the unit will also arrange training opportunities for professionals and resident site staff to enhance their site safety awareness.

Mr Lee stressed that construction safety had been accorded a very high priority by the Government.

"All TDD staff are therefore asked to ensure that safety on construction sites receives close attention, and that the safety message is spread as widely as possible," he said.

End/Sunday, April 2, 1995

Over \$15 million from Sir Robert Ho Tung Charitable Fund

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The Sir Robert Ho Tung Charitable Fund has recently granted a total of \$15.3 million to 52 charitable organisations in Hong Kong.

Announcing this today (Sunday), the Chairman of the Fund's Allocation Committee, Mr Bob Wilson, said major grants this year included \$2.73 million to the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Of this amount, \$1 million would be used to fund the setting up of geriatric rehabilitation wards in Fung Yiu King Hospital to improve the service for the elderly.

Another \$2.5 million was injected to the Samaritan Fund, which is under the management of the Hospital Authority, to enable it to provide heart valves, cardiac catheters and intraocular lenses to needy patients.

The St. John Council for Hong Kong received a sum of \$1.38 million for strengthening its various services.

Other grants included: \$0.75 million to Po Leung Kuk for renovating a day-activity centre cum hostel for mentally handicapped people; \$0.42 million to the Prince of Wales Hospital for advancing its equipment for organ transplantation; and \$0.28 million to the Caritas for providing comprehensive after school care service for children.

The Sir Robert Ho Tung Charitable Fund, one of the largest charitable trusts in Hong Kong, was set up with a bequest of \$0.5 million by the late Sir Robert Ho Tung in 1956.

In 1966, the capital of the Fund was increased through an injection of \$4.95 million from the China Charitable Fund set up by him.

The Sir Robert Ho Tung Charitable Fund is managed by HSBC Trustee (Hong Kong) Ltd.

Applications are invited in June every year through the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority, the Social Welfare Department, the Education Department and the Home Affairs Department.

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Stress Management Seminar for Teachers

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Secondary school principals and teachers are invited to attend a half-day seminar on "Stress Management for Teachers" to enhance their ability to cope with stress.

A spokesman for the Education Department said the seminar consists of talks by doctors following by a panel discussion.

In the seminar, he said, doctors will help participants to achieve a better understanding of stress and its cause, to help them to learn about the effects of stress on both body and mind and to handle it, the spokesman said.

The seminar - jointly organised by the Hong Kong Medical Association (HKMA) and the Education Department - will be held at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in the morning of Saturday, May 6.

The spokesman said the HKMA and the Department had conducted a pilot scheme between April and July 1993 when doctors, including psychiatrists and general practitioners, were invited to give talks to 76 schools on "Mental Health and Stress Management".

As the talks were very successful and found to be helpful, more talks were delivered by 67 doctors to 43,000 students from 101 schools during the 1993-1994 school year, he said.

Circulars and reply slips have been sent to schools inviting principals to nominate teaching staff to attend the seminar.

Completed reply slips should be returned to Senior Education Officer (Careers and Guidance Services) at Room 206, Mong Kok Government Offices, 30 Luen Wan Street, Mong Kok, Kowloon on or before April 13, 1995.

For further enquiries, please contact the Careers and Guidance Services Section at 2399 2183 or 2399 2177.

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Kwai Tsing District Board by-election result

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Counting of votes for Kwai Tsing District Board by-election in respect of Lai Wah constituency has been completed at 00.30 am today (Monday). The result is as follows:

Candidate -----	Number of votes -----
Mr Wong Yiu-chung	1,231 (elected)
Mr Lau San-ching	732

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1,969 cast votes at Kwai Tsing DB by-election

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The poll for the Kwai Tsing District Board by-election in respect of Lai Wah constituency closed at 10.30 pm today (Sunday).

During the 15-hour poll, a total of 1,969 voters have cast their votes, representing 26.8 per cent of the total of 7,346 registered electors.

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"Cheung Hok-yau" awarded for good service

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The quality service of Mr Cheung Hok-yau and three other staff members of the Education Department paid off when they were presented with the Education Department's Staff Incentive Award.

Appearing with Mr Cheung in the presentation ceremony are the three other winners: Ms Hui Sau-king, Ms Or Shuen-ling and Mrs Chu Lee To-chu.

Presenting the awards, which comprised a certificate of merit and a watch embossed with the department's logo, the Director of Education, Mr W K Lam said all staff members should keep up the service in helping the public with an open and friendly attitude.

Mr Cheung Hok-yau, Clerical Officer of Sham Shui Po District Education Office, was awarded not because he has the same name as a local popular singer but his friendliness and helpfulness in receiving the public.

With his sincere and frank manner in dealing with parents of new immigrant children from China seeking advice and assistance, he was able to answer their enquiries to their satisfaction.

Mr Cheung has no difficulties in communicating with visitors from different walks of life as he can speak English and several Chinese dialects, including Putonghua, Chiu Chow, Hakka and Cantonese.

Ms Hui Sau-king, Educational Psychologist in the Special Education Section, was nominated for her prompt action and dedicated service in rendering support to schools.

Her outstanding performance in providing counselling to the classmates of a schoolboy who was kidnapped and killed in September last year greatly impressed the school and her supervisor.

Ms Or Shuen-ling, Education Assistant with the Secondary School Places Allocation Section, was nominated for her patience and courtesy in handling enquiries from the public. Her understanding of the actual concern of the public and the genuine help she offered to them are worthy of praise.

Mrs Chu Lee To-chu, Clerical Officer of Yuen Long Public School, received the award for her readiness to give assistance to both students and parents.

Mrs Chu feels affection towards the students and takes good care of them at school. She is also effective and efficient in handling enquiries from parents.

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