



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Wednesday, June 20, 1973

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REVISED BASIS FOR ASSESSING CROWN RENT

The government has revised the basis for assessing the Crown rent payable under renewed Crown leases. Crown rent will now be assessed as a percentage of the rateable value rather than on the value of the land.

Announcing this in the Legislative Council today, the Attorney General, the Hon. J. Hobley, said that the Crown rent to be paid annually would be three percent of the rateable value at the date of renewal.

He added that this percentage had been "the subject of very careful consideration, with the needs of owners of smaller properties particularly in mind".

The revised Crown rent applies to renewable Crown leases yet to be renewed. This rent will remain in force throughout the term of the lease except where land is subsequently developed, in which case the Crown rent will be reassessed on the basis of the new rateable value once this is determined.

Those whose leases have already been renewed can elect to pay Crown rent on the rateable value basis with effect from July 1, if it is to their advantage to do so.

Commenting on the background to this decision, Mr. Hobley recalled that during the second reading of the Crown Leases Bill 1973, which was moved on March 28, several members had urged reconsideration of the basis of assessment.

They had drawn attention to the hardship which would be experienced by small property owners, the great number of associations united in opposition to the policy and the effect of high land prices on the level of reassessed Crown rents.

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The bill at that stage was already a modified version of earlier proposals, reducing the overall level of assessment by 20 per cent and arranging for introduction of the reassessed rent in stages so that the full impact would not be felt for some years.

Additionally, it was proposed that the effective date for reassessment should be one which ignored the greatly increased land values of recent months.

However, members had contended that the changes did not sufficiently lighten the impact on property owners, and at this point the debate was adjourned.

Since then the policy had again been re-examined, particularly with a view to meeting the case of the many thousands of owners of smaller flats.

In achieving this latter goal, which Mr. Hobley described as the "principal aim" of the revised bill, it had not proved possible to avoid benefitting all owners, or foregoing the major part of the revenue which would have accrued under the original terms of reassessment.

He said that the changed basis of reassessment, related to rateable value, had the merit of simplicity. It enabled the collection to be made in the form of a supplementary payment on the rates.

Other details of the new scheme had yet to be worked out and the necessary amendments to the bill had yet to be drafted. But it was intended that the revised bill would go forward as soon as possible.

Mr. Hobley also pointed out that since this new basis for reassessment would greatly reduce the revenue that would have been derived under the earlier proposals, the fiscal implications would clearly have to be examined.

"Meanwhile," he concluded, "I can assure Crown lessees whose leases expire at the end of this month that the legislation will provide that the leases shall be regarded as having been renewed with effect from July 1."

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BAN ON ESTABLISHING COMMODITY EXCHANGES

The Government has decided to ban for the time being, and with immediate effect, the establishment in Hong Kong of commodity exchanges dealing with specified commodities, initially 20 in all.

At present there are no specific legal controls relating to the establishment and operation of such exchanges.

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, in a statement to Legislative Council today said that the necessary legislation to give effect to this ban is now being drafted and will be presented to the council for consideration at an early date.

However, he stressed that, if passed, the legislation would take effect from today (June 20).

"In other words, no person or persons will be permitted to establish a market to deal or trade in the commodities specified whether in spot or futures contracts as from today. The only exceptions will be those markets or exchanges already in business at the present time, such as the daily rice auctions, the Gold and Silver Exchange and those organisations which have an established business on an agency basis in commodity futures traded on overseas exchanges," Mr. Haddon-Cave said.

He pointed out that it was not the government's intention to frustrate the development of a properly regulated commodity exchange, or possibly more than one exchange, at a later stage.

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"The intention rather is to ensure that, if and when such an exchange is established, it will operate in a well regulated and orderly manner, and in accordance with internationally accepted practices and standards."

He said he was aware of at least four separate groups in Hong Kong which were "actively pursuing" the possibility of setting up commodity exchanges.

The Financial Secretary said he felt there could be some benefit to the economy and to "our emergence as a sophisticated financial centre" from the establishment of a commodity exchange, provided it is well regulated and deals in commodities primarily of interest to the region, in addition to some of those at present being dealt in by the established exchanges overseas.

But they should not be permitted to open before adequate regulations "so vital to the proper running of a reputable international market" have been worked out.

Mr. Haddon-Cave explained that the government was taking the action because the establishment of a number of unregulated exchanges could well produce "a dangerous speculative situation".

Operations on a commodity exchange are in many ways more risky even than a stock exchange and the small man who risks his capital in this way can very easily lose it, he said.

An essential feature of a commodity exchange is the facility for making contracts for the delivery of commodities at a specified later date.

These deals are known as futures contracts and it is customary for only a proportion of the total value of the contract, usually 10 per cent, to be paid at the time of the agreement.

"Due to the rapid movements of commodity prices there are possibilities for large gains as well as large losses to be made by people trading this way on margins," the Financial Secretary added.

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NO SHORTAGE OF RICE IN HONG KONG

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, said today that there is no shortage of rice in Hong Kong; "nor will there be".

Speaking in the Legislative Council, he said the maintenance and likely future increase in imports from other principal suppliers -- China, Australia and the United States -- together with reserve stocks of nearly 70,000 tons, "are more than adequate to bridge any shortfall in supplies from Thailand".

"I am therefore satisfied that the rice supply situation is sufficient to supply our normal requirements for many months, and certainly until this year's major rice harvests come to the market."

He said the government's determination to maintain adequate supplies was evidenced by the fact that during the past week the Director of Commerce and Industry had released some 12,000 tons of rice from the control scheme reserve stock to retail outlets.

"As a result, those consumers who were buying rice on a large scale when prices were being irrationally bid up a few days ago are probably noting that rice is still plentiful in the shops and that prices are falling back to their earlier levels now that the initial wave of panic buying has receded," he added.

But, the Financial Secretary warned that the government would use its powers to safeguard supplies, and thereby stabilise prices, if there was any further evidence to suggest that the market was not operating satisfactorily.

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Turning to the recent price increases for vegetables and fish, Mr. Haddon-Cave pointed out that these, to a large extent, simply reflected the seasonal pattern -- adverse weather conditions affecting supplies.

He emphasised that so far there had been no developments to suggest any long-term changes in the supply position.

In the case of vegetables, he said, there could be no doubt that the rather large price increases for the current month had been due to inclement weather and extensive flooding in Kwangtung Province, which had delayed imports from China. At the same time, hot and humid conditions in Hong Kong had hastened the deterioration of cut vegetables.

A further factor influencing prices this month was the Dragon Boat Festival.

Mr. Haddon-Cave said that despite this he expected some increase in the volume of vegetables coming onto the market during the remainder of the month and a corresponding reduction in prices.

Adverse weather conditions and the Dragon Boat Festival were also the principal factors accounting for the rapid increase in fish prices this month.

However, he had already been informed that supplies were now increasing and retail prices falling as was the case with vegetables.

As to the "so-called heavy purchases" of local fish by Japanese interests, this actually accounted for only an insignificant proportion of total landings and he felt that it did not have any noticeable effect on the local supply and price situation.

Mr. Haddon-Cave said that he has spoken at length on the subject not only because he knew how sensitive the public is to price increases in essential foodstuffs - and rightly so - but also because he felt that an objective analysis of the facts could improve the situation by helping to dispel unfounded rumours.

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SENTENCING POWERS OF MAGISTRATES SET ASIDE

The Legislative Council today set aside, for the time being, proposed draft legislation which seeks to increase the sentencing powers of certain magistrates.

The decision to postpone the second reading of the Magistrates (Amendment) Bill 1973 followed a further examination of the bill, in consultation with the new Chief Justice.

In moving the motion for the adjournment, however, the acting Attorney General, the Hon. J. Hobley, emphasised that the decision not to proceed immediately with the bill should in no way be regarded as a weakening in the government's resolve in the fight against crime.

He explained that several factors had contributed to the conclusion that the bill might "safely be postponed for a while without prejudice to the interest which both the community and accused persons have in the early trial of criminal charges."

An important factor, he said, was that time ought to be taken to see whether the recent increase in the number of District Judges was sufficient to enable the District Court to deal effectively with any further increase in the number of criminal cases coming before it.

Furthermore, he went on, Unofficial Members had expressed concern that, if some of the criminal cases now tried in the District Court were to be tried before the magistrates' courts, legal aid should be available to the accused in those cases.

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"This is a matter of great importance," said Mr. Hobley, "but it is one which calls for careful study having due regard to the various, and sometimes conflicting, factors involved."

Mr. Hobley stressed that the object of the bill was to provide a means whereby a build-up of criminal cases awaiting trial could be tackled if necessary. It did not increase the sentence for existing offences neither did it create new offences.

The proposals to increase the sentencing powers of District Court Judges and certain magistrates were made in the face of a steady rise in the number of criminal cases, he said, because it was essential in the interest of accused persons and in the public interest that there should be no avoidable delay in bringing accused persons to trial.

Although both the Magistrates (Amendment) Bill 1973 and the District Court (Amendment) Bill 1973 were relevant to the Fight Violent Crime Campaign, he said, "they are not in themselves a weapon in the fight against crime."

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RESULTS OF VIOLENT CRIME CAMPAIGN

Greater police presence on the ground and a simplified procedure for reporting crime are expected to have a deterrent effect on violent criminals.

Since the beginning of the Fight Violent Crime Campaign on Monday, the police have already mounted 796 raids and have stopped and searched over 13,000 people. As a result 722 people have been detained.

The Secretary for Home Affairs, the Hon. J. Cater, told Legislative Council this afternoon that "the Royal Hong Kong Police and the Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Police will be making an even greater effort during the action phase of the campaign."

Fifteen reporting centres have been set up in Kaifong Association offices and public housing estates, and 25 similar centres will be set up next month.

In addition, police landrovers have also been deployed as mobile reporting centres in strategic locations.

Moreover, a new and simplified reporting procedure has been introduced based on the use of a simple pro forma which would help to cut down reporting time and speed up the processing of reports.

Mr. Cater said that this was only the beginning, and "everything possible will be done to increase the rate of detection of the violent criminal."

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SECRETARY FOR SECURITY APPOINTED

One further secretary post, as recommended in the McKinsey report, is announced today.

Mr. G.P. Lloyd, C.M.G., has been appointed acting Secretary for Security and will assume his duties in the next few days.

In his new post he will co-ordinate policy and programmes covering external security, emergencies, internal law and order, immigration, prisons, narcotics and fire services.

Mr. Lloyd, who is 46 has held top posts in the colonial service in a number of countries, the last being Fiji where he was Chief Secretary and also acting Governor on several occasions.

He was appointed to Hong Kong as Administrative Officer, Staff Grade A, in 1971. On arrival he became Defence Secretary and last year acted as Deputy Colonial Secretary for a number of months.

The government also announced today that Mr. David Whitelegge, the present Defence Secretary, will act as Commissioner for Census and Statistics during the absence of Mr. K. Topley, who is going on leave.

Mr. Whitelegge, 44, was appointed a Cadet Officer in Hong Kong in 1959 after serving six years in Malaya. Since then he has held a number of administrative posts including Assistant Colonial Secretary and Deputy District Commissioner, New Territories.

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Note to Editors: Photographs of Mr. Lloyd are boxed
this evening.

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DISTRICT JUDGES GET INCREASED SENTENCING POWERS

Three pieces of legislation which give added weight to the government's determination to crack down on violent crime were passed by the Legislative Council today.

The three bills are the District Court (Amendment) Bill 1973, the Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill 1973 and the Public Order (Amendment) Bill 1973.

The first bill gives increased sentencing powers to District Judges, the second provides for a new type of sentence to isolate habitual criminals from society, and the third strengthens the existing legislation dealing with possession of offensive weapons in public places.

In supporting the bills, the senior Unofficial Member, the Hon. P.C. Woo, said that members of a committee set up by the Bar Association had made certain representations to the unofficial members against the provisions of the original four bills.

He said the committee explained why it was in doubt as to the wisdom of interfering with the existing limitations of jurisdiction in the district courts and the magistracies.

"We appreciate the reasons for these views and have given them careful consideration. The Unofficials conclude that the change of jurisdiction proposed in the District Court represents the most effective and immediately practicable way of speeding up the disposition of the backlog of cases now facing the Supreme Court," Mr. Woo said.

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He said the bill was supported by the unofficials, but they recommended that it should be reviewed within two years to see whether it could be allowed to lapse and the additional jurisdiction relinquished.

Under the legislation, the maximum sentence which may be imposed by a District Judge is raised from five to seven years. This is to enable the court to deal more adequately with some of the more serious cases, presently tried in the Supreme Court, to be tried in the District Court.

During the Committee Stage of the Criminal Procedure Bill, Mr. Woo introduced two amendments (which were incorporated into the legislation), one restricting its operation to a list of scheduled offences, and another that altered the conditions set out in a new section which have to be met before a person can be sentenced to preventive detention.

"All in all," he said, "there should be adequate safeguards against abuse of the section."

Another unofficial member, the Hon. Hilton Cheong-Leen also supported the bill but expressed reservation about the preventive detention system.

He noted that the system had not been particularly successful in England. He hoped, however, that because of different social conditions, it would be successful in Hong Kong if it was handled with care.

He also hoped that the provisions in the bill would enable the government to clamp down on drug pushers thus stopping them from leading young people to drugs.

The Hon. Wilfred Wong gave strong support to the bill. He reasoned that "fairness to the individual should be weighed against fairness to society", and that hardened criminals should be detained in the interest of society as a whole.

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He quoted a prison authority who said that 90 per cent of the inmates of a large prison were repeaters, proving that certain people have established criminal tendencies.

Referring to the Public Order (Amendment) Bill 1973, Mr. P.C. Woo noted that during the three months from the middle of December last year to the middle of March this year, 196 people had been prosecuted for possession of offensive weapons in a public place.

"This suggests to me that the legislation is very necessary and that there can as yet be no relaxation of its provisions," he said.

The amended bill widens the scope of punishment and sets out various ways in which a court may deal with an offender between 13 and 17 years of age.

A note of concern, however, was voiced by Mr. Hilton Cheong-Leen who said the emphasis should be on reform and not bare punishment. He stressed that steps should be taken to separate the young offenders from the older and more hardened criminals.

He also pointed out that the government had a moral obligation to find out the deeper causes of crime committed by young people and seek possible solutions.

In replying to the unofficial members, the acting Attorney General, Mr. Hobley, said the views against increased powers of sentence for District Judges were fully appreciated by the government.

He emphasised that the proposal was not put forward lightly and that the government was fully satisfied the proposed increase in sentencing power was appropriate.

He also reassured them that no one who would have received legal aid had his case been tried before the Supreme Court but who is now to be tried before the District Court will be deprived of his right to legal aid.

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GOVERNMENT CRITICISED OVER MID-LEVELS LANDSLIDE

The government was today criticised in connection with development works in the Po Shan Road area prior to the landslide tragedy in June last year.

Reviewing the events that led to the tragedy exactly a year ago, the Hon. Szeto Wai said: "The Po Shan Road disaster is a tragic example that not only points to nonchalance, negligence and procrastination, but also gives rise to speculation of collusion."

Speaking in the Legislative Council during the adjournment debate on the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into the rainstorm disasters, he noted that the western Mid-Level area had a long history of landslips, going back as far as 1925.

"Unfortunately, the lesson from the many disasters has not been learned and the nonchalant attitude was allowed to continue culminating in the worst catastrophe on record."

In allowing intensive development in the area, he said, the government stood to be criticised, "not so much for the deficiencies in the building regulations as for the random granting of lease modifications to permit such intensive development without regard to the geological formation of the area which consists mainly of potentially unstable volcanic colluvial deposits."

While the commission had found the Building Authority's requirements for the design of site formation work for building projects generally acceptable, Mr. Szeto felt that more stringent requirements were needed in areas where the soil consisted of volcanic colluvium.

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In this regard, he proposed that all site formation works of appreciable magnitude should require a qualified civil engineer for their proper design and formation.

He therefore welcomed and supported a proposal by the Director of Public Works for the creation of a panel of expert civil engineers who were conversant with the property, characteristics and mechanics of soils.

Referring to the Po Shan Road landslide, Mr. Szeto said "negligence" could be seen in the inexplicable manner in which the Building Authority approved the very steep slope cutting at the rear of inland lot 2260 "with complete disregard of the nature of the soil."

Since approval for an 80.5 degree cut slope was normally only given to solid rock formation, it could be assumed that in this case no prior inspection by an engineer had been made to determine the nature of the soil.

"The officer approving the plans might have been misled intentionally by the authorised architect," he said. "But to approve plans of such important nature without requiring a thorough site investigation and in such a casual manner is incompetent, negligent and irresponsible to say the least."

Ample evidence of procrastination was also provided in the commission's report, said Mr. Szeto and he cited a number of dangerous situations that had developed in the area which, in his opinion, should have served as a warning of imminent disaster.

As regards the Sau Mau Ping landslide tragedy, Mr. Szeto noted that the commission contributed the cause to the unusually long and intense rain-storm and that human error had not been a contributory factor.

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"However, the wisdom of siting a licensed area with its flimsy huts and large population at the foot of such a high man-made slope in the face of Hong Kong's monsoonal climate must be questioned," he said.

Mr. Szeto shared the view of the commission that all excavation works should be programmed and be approved by the Building Authority to prevent exposure of large and dangerous cutting faces during wet seasons.

But he further recommended that owners of existing developments involving cut slopes of considerable height should be required to submit stability certificates by qualified engineers at suitable intervals.

This was because most cut slopes lacked maintenance after they were formed, and the chunam membrane commonly used in Hong Kong was vulnerable to cracks through which rainwater could penetrate, he explained.

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CO-OPERATION IS THE KEYNOTE

The Hon. Mrs. Joyce Symons today said that the vital lesson to be learned from the "dreaded events" of the June rainstorms last year was that "co-operation is the keynote to our common wellbeing."

She was speaking in the Legislative Council during the adjournment debate on the occasion of the first anniversary of the rainstorm disasters.

While there was no doubt that the heavy rainfall during the period had played a dominant role in the landslides, she said, "contributing factors may well have been human weakness."

"By this I mean carelessness, almost callousness," she said.

Mrs. Symons said she was convinced that from the events of June 1972 "must be born a new determination never again to let the public down in a matter of such significance."

She added: "It must be stated categorically by the government and impressed upon all civil servants that negligence, collusion, procrastination, indifference and ineptitude have no place in the Hong Kong future."

Referring to the Po Shan Road landslide area, she said a landslip in a cutting in that area in August 1971 led to a temporary suspension of construction work after it was discovered that the cutting was not of rock composition.

The alarming fact was, she went on, that even before typhoon Rose "a major cutting in that area was left unsupported and virtually unmaintained for more than seven years".

/Regardless

Regardless of this, the same site was allowed to be redeveloped in another way in early January 1971 to provide an increase of 36 flats, all with car parks.

"How else could this have been effected except at the expense of safety for all?" she asked.

The rock-cutting slope was increased to 80.5 degrees, she said, and the new architect's statement that the slope was of rock appeared to have passed unchecked and unchallenged.

"The carelessness of those concerned -- the architect, the developers, the relevant staff of the Public Works Department -- was in strange contrast to the many expressions of alarm by residents of the Po Shan Road area," she said.

"Another factor of human weakness was the desire to make money quickly by pressing ahead with the development without any consideration for the safety of those hapless people living nearby."

Mrs. Symons stressed that in Hong Kong, with its "occasional immaturity concerning public welfare," the government must assume even more responsibility in the regulations concerning architectural work.

The average citizen, she emphasised, had an inalienable right to expect the government to provide adequate provisions for safety to withstand torrential rain similar to that of last year.

Referring to the Sau Mau Ping landslide site, Mrs. Symons said that while the catastrophe was of major proportions, there appeared to be less evidence of human error, according to the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the two landslide disasters.

The Commissioners concluded that the landslip in this area was mainly due to the softening of the ground as a result of the exceptionally long and intense rainstorms.

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P.W.D. REJECTS ACCUSATIONS OVER LANDSLIDES

The acting Director of Public Works, the Hon. A.S. Robertson, today rejected outright accusations of alleged "procrastination" and "nonchalance" on the part of the Public Works Department in connection with the situation in the Mid-Levels area prior to last year's rainstorm disasters.

Speaking in the Legislative Council, Mr. Robertson expressed surprise and disappointment at the accusations and noted that nothing to justify them could be found in the report of the Commission of Inquiry which investigated the tragedies.

"Similarly, the commission did not find any evidence for collusion and made no reference even to the possibility of collusion," he said.

Mr. Robertson was replying to criticism from two Unofficial Members -- the Hon. Szeto Wai and the Hon. Mrs. Joyce Symons --- during the adjournment debate on the commission's final report.

He said the two speakers may have been influenced in their comments by the fact that no action was taken, between August 1971 and February last year, against the architect who had been responsible for the deep slope cutting behind inland lot 2260.

Mr. Robertson made it clear, however, that there was no time limit on the consideration by the board of a disciplinary offence.

The maximum penalty for such an offence, he explained, was removal of the offender from the register of authorised architects, and the architect in question had done this himself in December 1972, before the commission had completed its report.

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"On the other hand, any action, other than a disciplinary action, against the architect clearly had to await the deliberations of the commission," he added.

While he shared Mr. Szeto's views on the need for government to tighten up its controls in particular cases of proposed site formation works, Mr. Robertson rejected suggestions that the Public Works Department had in the past been "irresponsible" in accepting statements of authorised architects.

Authorised architects, he said, were a "privileged class" licensed to practise their profession in Hong Kong.

"Their responsibilities are clearly defined under the ordinance which licenses them, and the whole system of government approvals to plans -- which the government is under constant pressure to expedite and simplify -- will always depend upon the authorised professional carrying his proper share of the burden of responsibility," he stressed.

He added: "We must trust our authorised architects, but I take the point that we cannot trust all of them all of the time.

"This is where the government's responsibility lies -- to ensure that authorised architects as a class are worthy of trust, and that they are generally performing satisfactorily."

Mr. Robertson re-iterated that the landslides were not the result of a deliberate land development policy designed to extract the maximum revenue from land, or to develop hillsides beyond the point of safety.

While the science of soil mechanics was becoming increasingly precise, the commission had observed that the soils in Hong Kong were not simple homogeneous materials.

/This meant,

This meant, he said, that a general empirical method of working safely with these soils had to be developed and that the special areas, in which the general empirical solution must be refined, had to be identified.

He assured council that the approach to both these problems was being improved and that the solutions adopted would take into account all the relevant comments made by the commission and others.

Mr. Robertson was certain that the lesson of June 1972 would never be forgotten in Hong Kong and noted that all the immediate actions which could be taken to meet the situation had already been taken.

Action was in hand, he said, to identify areas in which site formation work required special attention and to provide the necessary means to deal with these areas effectively.

Reporting on the progress of remedial work during the past two months, Mr. Robertson said that the major engineering works at Sau Mau Ping and Po Shan Road had progressed satisfactorily despite bad weather.

Both areas were now considered safe from "all but minor mudslips, which would be inconvenient but not dangerous".

Consultants had also been appointed, he said, to review the overall problem of identifying areas of potential danger and to recommend remedial action, and to prepare a manual of good practice for site formation work as well as to advise on the procedures necessary to check that site formation proposals were properly presented and works properly executed.

In addition, the civil engineering staff of the Buildings Ordinance Office had been strengthened further through the appointment of consultants to examine new site formation plans.

It was hoped to issue a preliminary guide very soon to authorised architects to assist them in the preparation of such proposals.

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URBCO BUDGETS FOR SURPLUS

The 1973/74 budget for the Urban Council -- the first after its reconstitution shows an estimated surplus of \$40.8 million.

Revenue for the financial year, estimated at some \$267 million includes a \$20 million non-recurrent grant from the government.

The expenditure is estimated at slightly more than \$226 million.

Tabling the budget in Legislative Council today, the Director of Urban Services, the Hon. D.R.W. Alexander, pointed out that it was by necessity drawn up before the Council was reconstituted on April 1 this year. It was formally adopted at a meeting on April 10.

The greater part of the total expenditure, about 70.7 per cent, or some \$159.9 million, is allocated for personal emoluments and allowances.

About 10.9 per cent, or \$24.7 million is to be used for special expenditure, 0.4 per cent or \$0.9 million for capital works, and about 18 per cent or \$40.6 million for other charges.

The largest source of revenue is from rates, accounting for \$206.4 million or some 77.3 per cent of the total. The rest, about \$40.6 million or 15.2 per cent, is to be derived from fees, charges and other income.

The \$20 million government grant made up about 7.5 per cent of the total revenue.

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STUDENT FEES FOR POLYTECHNIC

Student fees for the polytechnic will not be increased in the near future but may be revised later on.

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, indicated this in the Legislative Council today when replying to a question by the Hon. Mrs. Joyce Symons.

Sir Hugh said the present fees of \$400 a year had remained the same since 1966 and were taken over by the polytechnic from the technical college when it was set up in August last year.

"It would therefore be reasonable to expect that the Board of Governors of the Polytechnic and the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee would wish to examine the adequacy of these fees in the light of the costs of running the polytechnic," he said.

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DROP IN NUMBER OF PRIMARY "DROPOUTS"

There has been a small but significant decrease over the last two years in the number of children dropping out of Primary 4, 5 and 6 classes.

The Director of Education, the Hon. J. Canning said today in Legislative Council that he had instructed headmasters to ensure that all children admitted to public primary schools should complete their six-year course, and he would exercise compulsory powers when necessary.

However, he pointed out that the primary school wastage figures were slightly exaggerated because they included the number of children who left school due to overage or because they wished to enter another school.

The real problem, he said, is to identify "on a school basis the true drop-outs among the children who leave one school in order to enter another."

Mr. Canning advised parents that slow-learning children did not have to abandon their studies, as the Special Education Section of his department could arrange for their placement in special schools or classes.

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MEASURES TO COMBAT OIL SPILLAGE

Approval will shortly be sought from the Finance Committee to provide the Marine Department with a specially designed launch to combat oil spillage, the Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, told the Legislative Council today.

He said the 70-foot launch would enable the department's Pollution Control Unit to meet the potential emergency of large oil spillages and to enforce anti-pollution legislation more effectively.

Although Hong Kong had never experienced any serious oil pollution, he said, both the government and industry had considered all aspects of the problem.

Careful consideration, he added, was now being given to the recommendations by a special sub-committee of the Port Executive Committee which was formed last year to consider the introduction of suitable legislation and codes of practice and to examine the adequacy of facilities and equipment for combating oil pollution.

At present, the Pollution Control Unit consisted of seven tug boats, seven twin crew lighters for logistical support and three fast personnel carriers to transport men and equipment, the Financial Secretary said.

It kept 10,000 gallons of chemical dispersant in stock and another 2,000 gallons could be purchased immediately on demand plus a further 300 to 500 gallons daily on a prolonged basis.

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The unit also maintained 500 feet of oil booms to contain oil spillages and to protect such vital areas as typhoon shelters, beaches and waterfronts, and a further 1,600 feet of light weight oil beams could, when necessary, be provided on loan by oil companies.

In addition to these facilities, the Fire Services Department maintained three fire boats which were equipped to deal with oil spillages and fully manned on a 24-hour basis, Mr. Haddon-Cave said.

The Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force helicopters were also available for reconnaissance purposes, he added.

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12 MILLION VEHICLES CROSS THE HARBOUR SINCE AUGUST

Almost 8.5 million vehicles, excluding C.M.B. and K.M.B. buses, have used the cross harbour tunnel since its opening in August last year. At the same time, 3.6 million vehicles were carried on the Hongkong and Yaumati vehicular ferries.

The breakdown of the figures was given to the Legislative Council today by the Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave,

The figures showed that in its first month of operation nearly 693,000 vehicles used the tunnel.

This climbed to a peak of 980,000 in March this year, but then dropped back to 932,000 the following month, only to rise again in May to 944,000.

During last August, the number of vehicles carried on the ferries was just over 381,000 and since then this has fluctuated from a low of 302,500 in February to 371,000 the following month. In May the figure stood at 358,000.

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HEUNG YEE KUK MEETS MR. ROYLE

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. Anthony Royle, yesterday (June 19) met a delegation from Hong Kong's Heung Yee Kuk now in London.

Led by the Kuk Chairman, Mr. Chan Yat-san, the 35-man delegation is on an official visit to Britain during which they will see new towns and urban developments.

Mr. Chan, on behalf of the Association of Chinese Traders in London, asked Mr. Royle if the immigration regulations could be relaxed to allow more workers from Hong Kong to go to Britain.

He pointed out that Chinese employers in Britain were suffering from an acute shortage of staff, especially in the restaurant trade.

Referring to the recently published McKinsey Report, Mr. Chan said the Heung Yee Kuk had set up a six-member committee to study the report and submit its views.

Mr. Royle assured the delegates that their views would be given careful consideration by the Hong Kong government.

In the evening, the delegates were guests of honour at a reception given by Mr. Royle at Lancaster House.

Earlier in the day, the Kuk members called on the Hong Kong students centre at Bayswater.

They then visited the Hong Kong Government Office in London where they were welcomed by Mr. A.M.J. Wright, the Commissioner for Hong Kong.

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JAPANESE VIOLINIST TO GIVE CONCERT

A well-known Japanese violinist, Takeshi Kobayashi, will give a recital on June 30 (Saturday) in the City Hall Concert Hall at 8 p.m. as a part of his cultural mission in Hong Kong.

The event is co-sponsored by the Urban Council and the Consulate-General of Japan.

Takeshi Kobayashi studied the violin under the famed teacher Shinichi Suzuki, and won the first prize in an all-Japan competition in 1949.

In the course of his career, he became the concert-master of various orchestras, and performed with famous orchestras in Europe.

On Saturday, Takeshi Kobayashi will play sonatas by Schubert, Beethoven, Prokofieff and Brahms. He will be accompanied on the piano by Noriyuki Miyazawa, a young Japanese pianist.

Tickets at \$3 (students only), \$5 and \$8 are available daily at the City Hall box office from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

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TRANSPORT ADVISORY COMMITTEE LOOKS AT MINI-BUS FARES

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, told the Legislative Council today that the question of controlling public light bus fares is being re-examined by the Transport Advisory Committee.

Until the government has received and considered the committee's further advice, Mr. Haddon-Cave said there was nothing more he could say at present.

He was replying to a question from the Hon. Wilson Wang who asked whether the government would take steps to control the fares in view of the increases imposed from time to time by mini-bus operators.

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EFFICIENT MAIL SERVICE

Statistical sampling carried out by the Post Office shows that about 98 per cent of the mail posted in Hong Kong is delivered in the main urban areas not later than the day following the date of posting.

The same delivery time is achieved for about 95 per cent of the correspondence in rural areas in the New Territories, the islands and some housing estates, where the small amount of mail justifies only one delivery a day.

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker said today in Legislative Council that the establishment of the Post Office had been strengthened over the past two years, and would be capable of maintaining this high standard of mail delivery.

In the main urban areas there are three collections and two deliveries everyday from Monday to Friday. There are two collections of mail in the rural areas of the New Territories on each week-day.

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UNIVERSITY FEE INCREASES

The Colonial Secretary, the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, today stressed that only those students who can afford to pay the recently announced new fee structure at the two universities would have to pay in full.

Those who cannot afford, or can only afford part of them, need only to approach the Student Finance Scheme which will offer assistance accordingly.

Sir Hugh said the paramount and continuing policy in this matter is to ensure that no student who has obtained a place should be denied a university education through lack of financial resources.

"The revision of fees were, therefore, accepted in the certain knowledge that the position of less well-off students would continue to be fully protected."

He pointed out that no action is necessary to avoid hardship being inflicted on existing students as the new fees do not apply to any of them.

"The new fees apply only to those students who will enrol after July 1974."

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WARM TRIBUTES TO MRS. ELLEN LI

The Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, today paid warm tribute to Mrs. Ellen Li who is retiring from the Legislative Council.

He mentioned her valuable work on the Urban Council, the Social Welfare Advisory Committee, the Po Leung Kuk, the Narcotics Advisory Committee and the Family Planning Association.

"But in this Council she will always be remembered with affection and respect as literally 'the first lady', he said.

"Her knowledge and her vigour and her sincerity will be greatly missed, but above all we will miss Mrs. Li for herself.

"I should like to wish her very happy and prosperous years ahead," he added.

The Senior Unofficial Member, Mr. P.C. Woo, also commended Mrs. Li on her contributions to the progress of Hong Kong and particularly her efforts towards improving women's rights.

"She has had much to do with moves towards equal pay for women, and more recently pensionability for married women in the civil service.

"She has even infringed on the sacred sphere of men and helped to abolish the status of concubines," he said.

Mr. Woo said he and his colleagues wished Mrs. Li every success in the future and was confident that she would continue to be active in community affairs.

The Colonial Secretary, Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, also joined the Governor and Mr. Woo in thanking Mrs. Li for her work and wished her every success in the future.

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ISSUE OF IDENTITY CARDS

For those arriving in Hong Kong legally and with the right to remain, identity cards are available after making a single application.

In reply to a question from the Hon. T.K. Ann, the Colonial Secretary the Hon. Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, said nearly 174,000 people entered Hong Kong legally during the past financial year.

For those applicants who entered Hong Kong illegally, the majority also need to apply only once if they are, after investigation, allowed to stay.

The number of applicants in this category amounted to more than 13,000 in the 12 months ended on January 31.

In the case of a minority of illegal immigrants, Sir Hugh said it could be a difficult and lengthy process to trace their background, often because the initial information they provided was false.

"For this reason, during the same period there were 1,640 applications from illegal immigrants who had already applied previously.

"The Government has in hand ways and means of reducing this figure but I am by no means convinced that amendment of the Regulations is either the right, the easiest or the quickest way."

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Release Time: 9.30 p.m.