



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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BEACONSFIELD HOUSE, HONG KONG. TEL.: 2842 8777

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Volunteers in adoption service commended

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Eighty-four volunteers who have rendered dedicated service to special needs children awaiting for adoption were today (Saturday) commended by the Director of Social Welfare, Mr Ian Strachan.

Speaking at the Third Award Presentation Ceremony for Volunteers in Adoption Service, Mr Strachan paid tribute to the volunteers for their unfailing support and hard work in assisting these children.

"Without your efforts, our special needs children could not be so well-prepared for adoption.

"Your help in visiting the children, taking them out to play and exercise, providing them with pre-adoption fostering, assistance in medical and nursing care and rehabilitation programmes, and sharing with them your love and care, are most important to our children's development in their health condition, self-care abilities, social skills and emotional development."

All these had greatly facilitated the children's successful integration into their new adoptive families, he added.

He noted that the young, normal and healthy children could join adoptive homes relatively quickly, most of them within three months after they were found suitable for adoption.

However, disabled children, those having health problems, children of older age and those with complicated family background had to wait longer for a suitable home, Mr Strachan said.

In order to increase the adoption chance of special needs children, Mr Strachan said his department had enlisted the co-operation of Mother's Choice and the International Social Service (Hong Kong Branch) and had entered into a formal arrangement on overseas adoption service with Holt International Children's Services in May.

"All these agencies have put in much efforts to publicise our overseas adoption programme so that more adoptive parents can be recruited for our special needs children.

"We have in the past years five foster families and volunteers who extend their love and care by providing the special needs child a permanent home through applying for adoption," he said. Mr Strachan said there were two similar successful cases and another one was in process this year.

The Social Welfare Department has successfully arranged 106 children for local adoption and another 15 for overseas adoption in 1994-95.

End

"Unreasonable" dismissal case clarified

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In response to press reports about a temporary staff of the Labour Department who claimed to have been dismissed after enquiring about the benefits she was entitled to under the Employment Ordinance, the Deputy Commissioner for Labour, Mr Alfred Chan, today (Saturday) clarified the case.

He said Ms Yuan Yuan was employed by the department as a temporary Workman II in two contracts. The first contract was effective from June 1, 1995 to August 31, 1995. Due to the need for additional hands for a recarpeting exercise in the department in mid-September, she was offered another contract from September 11, 1995 to December 9, 1995.

"The rescheduling of working hours of other permanent Workmen II in the General Registry has allowed the department more flexibility in the deployment of workmen. We no longer see any need for temporary staff from December 1995 and have therefore decided not to offer Ms Yuan a third contract.

"As her second contract is due to expire on December 9, notice was given to her on November 28, 1995 about the expiry. There is no question of a dismissal, much less a dismissal after she has enquired about her benefits under the Employment Ordinance," Mr Chan said.

He added that Ms Yuan would receive all the benefits she was entitled to under the Employment Ordinance on expiry of her contract.

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Interconnection charges by Internet service providers

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The Telecommunications Authority, Mr Alexander Arena, today (Saturday) released a Statement on the requirement for Internet Service Providers to pay interconnection charges to the Hong Kong Telephone Company (HKTC).

Mr Arena said: "Having considered submissions from the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the fixed telecommunications network operators, and having taken legal advice, I must confirm that under the current law the ISPs must pay the interconnect charge to HKTC when the ISPs' customers access information over the World Wide Web."

This matter has been the subject of differing views in the industry, with some ISPs paying the charge and others not paying it.

"I have no alternative but to apply the existing law as it is written," said Mr Arena. "And to ensure that it is applied uniformly across the industry."

"The ISPs have made a number of submissions to me on the interconnection charge which I will consider further in a number of reviews that OFTA has been conducting on pricing and charging issues."

Details of these reviews are included in the TA's Statement. A study of the methodology and level of the interconnection charge, which is currently set at 9 cents per minute, is one of these reviews. Another review concerns the price control arrangements which apply to HKTC.

"Should these reviews lead to a change in policy regarding the PNETS charge, the Hong Kong Government will attempt to put forward new legislative proposals quickly," continued Mr Arena. "However, I cannot anticipate what these policy changes might be and, in the interim, I have no alternative but to enforce the existing law."

End

Contracts for employment outside HK must be observed

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Every contract for employment outside Hong Kong must be signed by the employer or his representative and the employee before the employee leaves Hong Kong.

The contract must contain all the particulars required by the Contracts for Employment Outside Hong Kong Ordinance to define the rights and obligations of both parties and be presented to the Commissioner for Labour for attestation before the employee's departure.

The acting Labour Officer (Employment Agencies & External Employment), Mr David Tam, said today (Saturday) that the Ordinance applied to all contracts entered into in Hong Kong by manual employees and those non-manual employees with monthly wages not exceeding \$20,000 who were employed to work outside Hong Kong by employers who were not in Hong Kong and were not running a business locally.

"An employer or his agent will commit an offence if he fails to obtain a written contract or present a contract for attestation by the Commissioner before the employee leaves Hong Kong.

"Moreover, a person will commit an offence if he induces an employee to enter into a contract which does not comply with the Ordinance or leave Hong Kong to take up employment before the contract is attested," he explained.

The maximum penalty for each offence is \$50,000.

Enquiries on overseas employment may be made to the Labour Department's External Employment Service on 2852 3511 or 2852 3540.

End

Yuen Long Fire Station Open Day

The Yuen Long Fire Station will be open to members of public from 10 am to 6 pm tomorrow (Sunday).

The Chairman of the Yuen Long District Board, Mr Tai Kuen, will officiate at a lion eye-dotting ceremony to kick off the open day.

The event is part of the Fire Services Department's efforts to promote the 1995-96 Fire Prevention Campaign.

Members of the public visiting the fire station will have a chance to learn more about fire prevention in commercial premises - the theme of this year's campaign.

They can also see various modern fire engines and equipment, and a demonstration on fire-fighting and rescue.

More than 1,000 primary students and teachers have been invited to visit the fire station which is located at 2 Fung Kam Street, Yuen Long.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	\$ Million	Time (Hours)	Cumulative Change (\$ Million)
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Opening Balance in the account	1,272	09:30	-9
Closing Balance in the account	1,963	10:00	-9
Change Attributable to:		11:00	-9
Money Market Activity	-9	11:30	-9
Laf Today			+700

Laf Rate 4.25% Bid/6.25% Offer TWI 122.6 *+0.0* 2.12.95

End

The Governor's "Letter to Hong Kong"

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Following is the full text of the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten's broadcast on RTHK's "Letter to Hong Kong" today (Sunday):

What's the best view in Hong Kong, the one that most indelibly prints the essence, the very nature of Hong Kong on your memory?

Is it the view from the Star Ferry on a fine day as you buck and weave your way across the harbour, looking up at the Peak and the skyscrapers - those side-by-side tributes to God and mammon?

Or is it the view from the top of the Dragon's Back - Shek-O and its silver beaches below, and the deep green hill tops folding and unfolding ahead of you?

Or maybe you prefer Sai Kung, Double Haven, the Lantau Buddha; or any market scene with the red light shades, the exotic fruit, the fish in tanks, the hens in wicker cages; or the window of your favourite baker's; or the back of the shop in any ironmonger's.

Well, there's no shortage of choices. But high up on everyone's list must surely come the spectacle of race night at Happy Valley; Hong Kongers enjoying themselves, doing one of the things they like best. Every visitor I've ever taken to Happy Valley has come away just as excited as I'd told them they would be. The first time my sister came to Hong Kong, she went virtually straight from the 'plane to the race track. She's never forgotten that initial overwhelming sight. There's literally nothing like it in the world.

The crowd and the hustle and the bustle as dusk closes in and the lights around the track and up and down the sides of the valley and on the passing double decker buses blaze across the sky. The yellows and greens and reds of the jockeys and the swagger and polish of the trainers. The excitement of the races themselves - flashing boards with their incomprehensible mathematical messages to the betting faithful, a squadron of galloping horses cresting the last bend and hitting the gallop for home, the sound of the hooves and the roar of the crowd and the whoosh of relief when it's all over, and the bouquets and the silver trophies and the "bigwigs" from the Jockey Club in the winners' enclosure.

Last weekend it was better than ever. We went - over 50,000 of us altogether - to the opening of the new track, a broad band of green velvet cambering over what had once been the Football Club. It was a perfect evening, the end of a flawless autumn afternoon - blue skies and scudding white clouds. Stepping on to the track from the new marble halls where the ancient and powerful club administers its affairs, you could see the race track sweeping down from its highest point to the grandstands rising like cliff-faces to the right. If the horses ran backwards, that I suppose would be their Tattenham Corner view.

I said it was a perfect evening. Not quite. I tried a new system of betting. It works even less well than its predecessors. Let me tell you about it so that you can avoid doing anything half so stupid yourselves.

You turn to the chart in your favourite newspaper which summarises the predictions of all the professional tipsters from Captain Courageous to Madame Voodoo. Then you take a pencil and draw a line diagonally across the paper from the top left hand corner of the chart to the bottom right hand. Following this, you proceed to bet on each of the predictions touched by the line, so for example in the first race you bet on the horses at the top of the left hand column; in the second, you bet on the horses two down in the column second from the left. And so on triumphantly down the page. A multiple tierce on each one will help to maximise your chances of losing steadily all evening.

I can now confirm that this is not a system that will make your fortune; it is not even a system that will enable you to pay for a taxi home, should that be required. You would think twice about recommending it to the person you liked least in the world, and you might not even offer it to a friend.

So next time, I'm going back to the drawing board, and combining the clairvoyance of a friend's amah, names that my wife likes, numbers that are divisible by three, and grey horses. However, if any of these animals walks side-ways when it gets out on the track my most distinguished adviser tells me to drop it like a hot cake straightaway. He may be right or he may just have an aversion to hairy crabs.

Win or lose, it was a happy evening.

Even as the crowds streamed home - some presumably having done better than me - a small group of very distinguished American think-tankers and scholars was arriving in Hong Kong, carrying under their arms heavy volumes which summarised their judgements on the economies of the world, ours included. They come from a celebrated Washington number-crunching, philosophy-thumping organisation called the Heritage Foundation. Every year they survey the economies of the world and pronounce their verdict. What are they searching for? It doesn't have to be grey or divisible by three. But it is the sort of thing you'd want to put your money on. What they are looking for is the free-est economy in the world.

Their index of freedom covers all the traditional long term guarantees of economic health and social harmony. They comb through all the statistics and the policies and the records, looking at the rule of law and tax and prudent spending policies - prudent spending policies - and regulation and de-regulation and open markets and hands-off or hands-on policies on business. They have ten tests like that. And when they've measured performance, they tot up the figures and give an overall assessment.

You may have read the result already, or guessed it from my breathless build-up. Yes, Hong Kong won once again - at a canter. Last year they placed us first equal with Singapore. This year we were out front on our own, winners by at least a head.

Hong Kong - the free-est economy in the world.

Now, it's not patronising to suggest that most of those at Happy Valley last Saturday evening have probably never heard of the Heritage Foundation and its Freedom Index. But they won't have been surprised by its conclusions. They know we've got a system which is unbeatable - free, decent and successful. They know that their way of life - which includes the right to keep the Jockey Club well-endowed through the proceeds of their free choices about what to do with their own money - they know that their way of life is admired by the rest of the world. They want their way of life to continue.

I hope all those who make a lot of noise in the next year and a half will remember that. I hope they'll recognise that their responsibility to safeguard that way of life transcends all else - ambition, fear, puzzlement, duty, worry. Let's hold on to a few simple truths.

What was really the best sight at Happy Valley? Simple. Free men and free women enjoying themselves in a free society. A free Chinese society. A free Chinese society that's worth betting on and worth standing up for.

End

Plea on safe use of electrical and mechanical products

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The Deputy Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services, Mr Leung Cham-tim, today (Sunday) urged members of the public to exercise more care in the use of electrical products and mechanical machinery.

"Improper usage of these facilities may post a danger to our lives," he warned.

Mr Leung made the appeal when officiating at the opening ceremony of an electrical and mechanical safety carnival at the Shek Wu Hui playground this afternoon.

The carnival was organised by the Electrical and Mechanical Industry Safety and Health Committee.

Mr Leung noted that in order to protect workers and the general public from unsafe mechanical and electrical facilities, the Government had introduced, through legislation, a series of essential safety regulations and standards.

"Electrical work can only be carried out by electrical workers and contractors who have registered under the Electricity Ordinance.

"Their performance are monitored through a point system to ensure that their works comply with the required safety standards," he said.

Turning to the safety of electrical products, Mr Leung said the Plugs and Adaptors (Safety) Regulation enacted on March 23 this year had helped improve considerably the safety standards of plugs and adaptors sold to consumers.

"A more comprehensive Electrical Products (Safety) Regulation, which aims at controlling all household electrical products, is being drafted. The drafting is expected to be completed by early 1996," he said.

On the safety of lifts and escalators, Mr Leung said all such installations in Hong Kong must be tested, inspected and registered in accordance with the Lifts and Escalators (Safety) Ordinance.

"In order to ensure that only compatible persons are allowed to carry out such work, all lifts and escalators engineers and contractors must be registered with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department," he noted.

End

Watch out for imposters

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The Labour Department today (Sunday) advised company proprietors to watch out for people posing as officers of the department.

The advice followed recent reports about some companies which received telephone calls from people who claimed to be officers of the department and asked for particulars of their companies.

A spokesman for the department said departmental officers making enquiries would always make known their names and the names of their offices.

"Officers conducting site inspections are also instructed to identify themselves by showing their warrant cards.

"If proprietors have any doubts about a caller's identity, they should ask for his contact telephone number or office address so that follow-up actions can be taken," he said.

They should also check with the Labour Department or report immediately to the nearest police station if they have further doubts.

End