



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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HK/US joint statement on textiles consultations

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Delegations from the United States and Hong Kong governments met today (Wednesday) to discuss issues concerning textiles trade, especially the recent steps announced by the US Customs concerning the import of certain textiles categories from Hong Kong.

The US side, led by the Deputy US Customs Commissioner, Mr Mike Lane, comprised representatives from the US Consulate General and the US Customs. The Hong Kong side, with representatives from the Customs and Excise and the Trade departments, was led by the Commissioner of Customs and Excise (designate), Mr Lawrence Li.

The two sides agreed it was in the interest of all legitimate traders and the two governments to act aggressively against companies engaged in transshipping textiles and apparel.

The Hong Kong delegation, however, reiterated their concern and objection to the recent steps announced by the US Customs which were taken without prior consultation, against certain textiles exports from Hong Kong and which could affect the commercial interests of legitimate traders.

In reply, Mr Lane said the new US measures were aimed principally at US importers and, since the steps were simply modifications of existing practices, should not pose a significant extra burden on legitimate traders.

Nevertheless, the US side recognised the concerns of the Hong Kong Government and, as a result, the two sides have pledged to work together intensively over the near term to ameliorate the impact of the US steps on legitimate manufacturers.

This was a point that the US Consulate General and representatives of the US Customs Service would also make in a subsequent meeting with a delegation from the Hong Kong textiles industry, Mr Lane said.

That was, he said, that the US Government intended to do all it could to facilitate trade by legitimate manufacturers, while maintaining and improving the US vigilance against transshipment.

The Hong Kong delegation welcomed the assurance given by Mr Lane that the US Customs would take steps to ameliorate the disruption to trade.

These included a commitment by the United States to make its best efforts to perform verifications within 48 to 72 hours of the authenticity of suspected shipments detained in the US. The US side would also consider ways by which the single entry bond requirement could be waived in respect of certain shipments.

Mr Lane promised to continue to work closely with the Hong Kong Government on this important issue.

The US side expressed that they would like to pursue the idea of joint verification with the Hong Kong Customs. They noted Hong Kong's new certification arrangement, which contains as a key element production verification procedures, could provide a basis for longer term co-operation between the two Customs services.

The Hong Kong delegation also agreed that an effective way of enhancing the general awareness of the problem of illegal transshipment in the community is to publish the prosecuted cases of significance and the punishment awarded in respect of such cases.

The two delegations agreed to meet again soon to discuss concrete measures that can be developed to enhance joint efforts to combat illegal transshipment of textiles.

Mr Li and Mr Lane, taking note of the recently concluded Hong Kong-US Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement, said it was within the spirit of the long time and close relations between the two Customs services to work together on such common concerns.

End

Witness Protection Bill to be gazetted

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The Government will introduce a bill to provide a legislative framework for existing Witness Protection Programmes (WPPs) and legal authority for the change of identity of high-risk witnesses, a government spokesman said today (Wednesday).

The Witness Protection Bill, to be gazetted on Friday (June 21), aims to enhance the effectiveness of existing witness protection arrangements and encourage members of the public to be more willing to come forward to give evidence.

The spokesman said the Bill sought to give legal backing to the key features of existing WPPs being operated by the Police and the ICAC.

The Bill also provides clear statutory powers for government officials to change the identity of a protected witness, through the issue of new documents pertaining to the identity of the witness based on fictitious information.

The spokesman said under the proposed system for the change of identity, all identification documents including those of the witness' spouse and children could be covered.

"We hope the new scheme would provide greater reassurance to protected witnesses," he said.

He explained that under the scheme, any change of identity for a witness would require approval from the Governor upon the personal recommendation by the Commissioner of Police or the Commissioner of the ICAC.

"The high level approving authority should ensure that the scheme will not be abused," he said.

To demonstrate the Government's commitment to witness protection, the spokesman said the Bill also proposed to introduce penalties to certain offences.

"The Bill proposes to make it an offence for the disclosure of any details under the WPP, including the identity of any officer involved, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse by people who have been admitted or have been assessed but refused admission to the WPP.

"It is proposed that such an offence should carry a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment while any disclosure of information which compromises the security of the witness should be punishable on conviction to a maximum 10 years' imprisonment.

"At the same time, government officials performing functions under the WPPs are also given reassurance as they will be protected from civil or criminal liability," the spokesman said.

The Bill is expected to be introduced into the Legislative Council on July 3.

End

Public urged to report unsafe industrial occurrences

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The Deputy Chief Factory Inspector of the Labour Department's Occupational Safety and Health Branch (OSHB), Mr Wong Ching-kwok, today (Wednesday) appealed to members of the public to report unsafe occurrences in industrial undertakings through the industrial safety hotline 2815 0678.

He said the hotline had been set up at OSHB in the department's Headquarters and was being operated on a 24-hour basis.

"This hotline is intended to facilitate members of the public to lodge complaints about unsafe occurrences in any industrial undertakings, including construction sites, factories, catering establishments and other notifiable workplaces.

"Members of the public wishing to report industrial accidents and make enquiries on industrial safety matters are also welcomed to contact our factory inspectors through the hotline," Mr Wong said, stressing that callers' identity will be kept as confidential information.

"We will take immediate action as far as possible upon receiving information through the hotline and will consider taking out prosecutions if our investigations reveal any breaches of industrial safety laws," he said.

He also asked all workers engaged in industrial work activities, especially construction workers, to make use of the hotline when they encounter personal safety problems.

"They should contact our factory inspectors if they have any doubts as a simple call may save their lives and the lives of their fellow workers," said Mr Wong.

End

Handbook and video to assist new arrivals

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About 100,000 copies of a handbook listing dedicated and general services for new arrivals from China will be available from today (Wednesday) to assist them in adapting to the local way of life and to meet their special needs.

Distributing the first copy of the handbook at the Registration of Persons - Kowloon Office in the Empire Centre today, the Director of Home Affairs, Mrs Shelley Lau, said the handbook carried clearly indexed information on a wide range of services provided by government departments as well as voluntary agencies.

"We hope the handbook will be useful to the new arrivals in helping them with their enquiries and obtaining the services they needed.

"We are keen to assist them in integrating into the local community as quickly as possible," she said.

The 105-page handbook published by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) contains concisely presented facts on social welfare, housing, education, employment, medical care, family planning, anti-corruption, transport, immigration and emergency services.

Written in simplified Chinese, the handbook also contained the addresses and telephone numbers of various government departments and public utility companies.

It will be available for collection from today at the Lo Wu Immigration check point, Registration of Persons - Kowloon Office in Empire Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui and all district offices.

HAD has been tasked with monitoring and assessing the services being provided for new arrivals from China since October last year following the increase in daily quota for one-way permit holders from 105 to 150 starting July 1995.

Meanwhile, a video aiming to promote the new arrivals' understanding of the general living condition and social services available for them was also shown in the Registration of Persons Office today.

Initiated by the Social Welfare Department, the video was produced by the International Social Service-Hong Kong (ISS-HK) a voluntary agency with extensive experience in providing services for new arrivals from China. It contains information on the wide range of services from government and non-governmental organisations available to them and to encourage them to seek help as early as possible.

The 22-minute video, in Cantonese or Putonghua and interspersed with captions at appropriate intervals, contains information on post-migration service, medical service, housing, education, local employment service, labour regulation, immigration regulation and the enquiry services of the respective district offices.

The Social Welfare Department will distribute 250 copies of the video to relevant government departments, hospitals, clinics and non-governmental welfare organisations. The video is also available on loan from ISS-HK for a handling fee of \$10.

Joining Mrs Lau in today's distribution exercise included the Deputy Director of Home Affairs, Mr Dominic Law; the Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare), Mrs Patricia Chu and the Assistant Director of Education (Services), Mr David Pun.

End

Upgrading of two footbridges in Wan Chai

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The Highways Department today (Wednesday) awarded a works contract to Cheung Kee Fung Cheung Construction Company Limited to upgrade the footbridges at Percival Street and Fleming Road across Gloucester Road.

The \$36-million contract is mainly for the construction of a replacement footbridge to the existing one at Percival Street.

The new covered footbridge will be extended across Gloucester Road, Gloucester Road Service Road and Percival Street to link up with Sino Plaza

The contract also includes the extension of the existing footbridge at Fleming Road to cross Gloucester Road Service Road and improvements with a cover for the whole footbridge.

A Highways spokesman said: "On completion of the works, the two footbridges will provide direct access for pedestrians to cross Gloucester Road Service Road at Percival Street and Fleming Road to enhance road safety and traffic flow."

Works will start soon for completion in December 1997.

The department's Hong Kong Region Office has commissioned the works project to Acer Consultants (Far East) Limited, who has designed the works and will supervise their construction.

End

Fees for dangerous goods services revised

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Fees for services set out in four regulations related to mining and the manufacture, storage, conveyance and usage of explosives will be revised with effect from November 1, 1996.

The four regulations are the Mining (General) (Amendment) Regulation 1996, Mines (Safety) (Amendment) Regulation 1996, Dangerous Goods (Government Explosives Depots) (Amendment) Regulation 1996 and Dangerous Goods (General) (Amendment) Regulation 1996.

A government spokesman said the revised fees were necessary to recover the administrative and operating costs involved.

He expected that the effect of the new fees on the construction industry as a whole would be minimal as the costs of explosives used for blasting constituted a very small part of the total cost of construction projects:

The old and new fees for some of the major services set out in the four regulations are as follows :

	<u>Old</u>	<u>New</u>
Permit for discharge of explosives	\$31,200	\$38,920
Licence to store explosives	\$23,800	\$26,060
Permit to move explosives	\$ 105	\$ 170
Renewal of a mine blasting certificate	\$ 1,200	\$ 1,910
Delivery of explosives exceeding 50 kilograms but not exceeding 100 kilograms	\$ 4,075	\$ 4,850

The spokesman said the Dangerous Goods Standing Committee which has representatives from the private sector, including those from the chemical, shipping, petroleum and godown industries, had been consulted and had no objection to the revision.

Details of the new fees will be published in the government gazette on June 21, 1996 (Friday).

End

Tai Po lot to let

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The Lands Department is inviting tender for the short-term tenancy of a piece of government land in Tai Po, New Territories.

The lot, with an area of about 3,250 square metres, is located at Tai Po Area 1. It is intended for use as a fee-paying public car park for the parking of private cars, light vans and goods vehicles.

The tenancy is for 18 months, renewable monthly.

The closing date for submission of tender is noon on July 5.

Tender form, tender notice and conditions may be obtained from the Lands Department, 14th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, and the district lands offices of Kowloon and Tai Po.

Tender plan can also be inspected at these offices.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	<u>\$ million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	1,740	0930	+218
Closing balance in the account	1,950	1000	+218
Change attributable to :		1100	+218
Money market activity	+230	1200	+220
LAF today	-20	1500	+230
		1600	+230

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 124.1 *0.0* 19.6.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.94	2 years	2805	6.30	99.99	6.40
1 month	5.05	3 years	3904	6.30	98.99	6.80
3 months	5.21	5 years	5106	7.23	99.58	7.47
6 months	5.44	7 years	7305	7.60	99.64	7.81
12 months	5.81	5 years	M502	7.30	99.17	7.66

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$22,437 million

Closed June 19, 1996

End

Overseas scholarships awarded to 13 young talents

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Thirteen talented young musicians and dancers, aged between 20 and 32, have been awarded overseas scholarships for the year 1996-97 by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Music and Dance Fund.

Seven of them will be going to the United Kingdom, four to the United States, one to Australia and one to the Netherlands. They will take up courses in dancing, singing or musical instruments such as piano, flute, bass trombone and percussion.

A spokesman for the Broadcasting, Culture and Sport Branch said today (Thursday) the Hong Kong Jockey Club Music and Dance Fund was set up in 1979 with a donation of \$10 million from the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club for the promotion and development of music, dance and other related activities. In 1994, a capital injection of \$22 million was provided by the Club to meet increased needs.

The Fund, a non-statutory trust fund administered by a board of trustees, has so far benefited about 150 people for overseas scholarships and the awards this year will cost more than \$2 million.

It also provides grants to schools and non-profit making organisations in procuring or repairing musical instruments, dance equipment, scores and engaging part-time instructors for organising music and dance classes. In addition, there are ad hoc grants to finance projects for the promotion of music and dance activities.

End