



# DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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TRIUMPH FOR THE SYSTEM, SAYS ACTING GOVERNOR  
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THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A STATEMENT MADE BY THE ACTING GOVERNOR, SIR PHILIP HADDON-CAVE THIS EVENING:

+I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY, BUT THIS HAS BEEN A GOOD DAY FOR UNOFFICIALS. IN THEIR SPEECHES THIS AFTERNOON THEY'VE CONVEYED VERY EFFECTIVELY THE DEEP ANXIETIES OF THE TAXI TRADE AND OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC. IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE CASE FOR OUR PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS HAD NOT COME ACROSS WELL AND HAD, INDEED, EVEN BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD.

+BUT IF IT'S BEEN A GOOD DAY FOR UNOFFICIALS, I THINK IT'S BEEN AN EVEN BETTER DAY FOR OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS EVEN A TRIUMPHANT ONE. IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION FROM UNOFFICIALS THE SYSTEM HAD TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY AND IT DID.

+AFTER LISTENING CAREFULLY TO MEMBERS' VIEWS THE GOVERNMENT SIDE ALLOWED THE BILLS ON THE TAX MEASURES TO BE VOTED OUT ON THE SECOND READING AND SO THE WHOLE PACKAGE WILL NOW HAVE TO BE RECONSTRUCTED. THAT IS HOW OUR SYSTEM OF CONSULTATIVE DEMOCRACY IS DESIGNED TO WORK WHEN GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS PROVE TO BE UNACCEPTABLE TO OUR LEGISLATIVE BODY.

+BUT LET US NOT FORGET THAT THE PROBLEM OF DEVISING AN UP-TO-DATE TAXI POLICY HAS NOT GONE AWAY. IT REMAINS WITH US. SO WE MUST NOW QUICKLY RETURN TO THE DRAWING BOARD AND PUT FORWARD FRESH PROPOSALS TO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IN DOING SO WE SHALL TAKE FULLY INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS EXPRESSED SO ROBUSTLY THIS AFTERNOON IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND, INDEED, ELSEWHERE DURING THE PAST FEW RATHER EVENTFUL DAYS.

+ONE CANNOT DIVORCE THE FARE INCREASE FROM THE QUESTION OF TAXI POLICY GENERALLY BUT, AS I HAVE JUST SAID, WE INTEND TO GO BACK TO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN THE NEAR FUTURE, HOPEFULLY IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.+

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STRENGTH OF CONSTITUTION DEMONSTRATED  
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THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, THE HON MICHAEL THOMAS, VOICED HIS SUPPORT TODAY FOR THE CONCLUSION BY SEVERAL UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS THAT THE FAILURE OF A LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL DEMONSTRATED THE STRENGTH, NOT THE WEAKNESS, OF THE CONSTITUTION.

+A SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES (TO PICK UP MR CHARLES YEUNG'S PHRASES) IS A NECESSARY FEATURE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF A FREE SOCIETY IF IT IS TO BE WELL GOVERNED AND CAPABLE OF ABSORBING THE MAJOR SHOCKS AND PRESSURES THAT ARE BOUND TO COME ITS WAY,+ MR THOMAS SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

+WHILE THE UNOFFICIALS ARE NOT DELEGATES OF THE PUBLIC, THEY ARE APPOINTED TO INTERPRET AND EXPOUND THE VIEWS OF THE PUBLIC AND TO PARTICIPATE IN REACHING A FINAL JUDGEMENT UPON THE PUBLIC INTEREST,+ HE ADDED.

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HE POINTED OUT THERE WOULD ALWAYS REMAIN THE FINAL OPINION OF MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL IN WHICH THERE IS A CLEAR MAJORITY OF UNOFFICIALS.

+THIS COUNCIL IS THE ULTIMATE SAFEGUARD IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO MISJUDGE WHAT IS POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE IN HONG KONG.

+FOR THESE REASONS, I THEREFORE SEE TODAY'S EVENTS NOT AS A LOSS OF FACE FOR OFFICIALS BUT RATHER AS A VINDICATION OF THE SYSTEM, ITS EFFECTIVENESS, AND ABOVE ALL ITS READY RESPONSE TO THE POLITICAL MOOD AND JUDGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY,+ MR THOMAS STRESSED.

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LEGISLATION AIMED AT IMPROVEMENTS FOR EVERYONE  
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THE PROPOSED TAXI LEGISLATION WAS AIMED AT IMPROVING THE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EVERYONE, THE SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS, THE HON DENIS BRAY, TOLD THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY.

+IN ITS IMPACT ON THE TAXI USERS IT WAS ASSESSED AS ACCEPTABLE BOTH AS TO THE STANDARD OF SERVICE AND IN THE INCREASE IN CHARGES,+ HE SAID. +IN ITS IMPACT ON TAXI OPERATORS IT WAS ANTICIPATED THAT INCOME GENERATED BY INCREASED FARES WOULD BOTH RESTORE PROFITABILITY TO FORMER LEVELS AND COVER INCREASED TAXATION.+

MR BRAY SAID THAT LITTLE OF WHAT HAD BEEN SAID IN THE COUNCIL THIS AFTERNOON HAD THROWN DOUBT ON THE WISDOM OF THESE AIMS.

ON THE EXTENT AND FORCE OF THE REACTION BY TAXI OPERATORS, MR BRAY SAID THAT IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THEY WOULD EXPRESS A GOOD DEAL OF OPPOSITION AND TAKE STRONG ACTION TO PRESS THEIR VIEWS. BUT : +IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE EXTENT OF THE TRAFFIC DISRUPTION WAS OBVIOUS FOR ALL TO SEE THAT ANYBODY BEGAN TO SAY, WITH COMMENDABLE HINDSIGHT, THAT STOPPAGE OF SERVICE WAS AN INEVITABLE CONSEQUENCE OF THE MEASURES PROPOSED.+

HE SAID THAT THE MEASURES WERE BASED ON AN EXTENSIVE STUDY WHICH SHOWED THAT TAXIS WERE NOT ESSENTIAL CARRIERS IN THE CONTEXT OF A VASTLY IMPROVED TRANSPORT SYSTEM, AND WERE AN INCREASING CAUSE OF CONGESTION.

THIS DEVELOPING TREND COULD NOT CONTINUE INDEFINITELY WITHOUT UNACCEPTABLE CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF INCREASING CONGESTION FOR THE GREAT MASS OF USERS OF TRANSPORT FACILITIES, HE ADDED.

HE REVIEWED REACTION TO THE BILLS AND THE REASONS FOR IT BEFORE GOING ON TO DETAIL THE PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORT THAT HAD BEEN MADE.

FINALLY, SAID MR BRAY : +I DO THINK THAT OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT HAS A REMARKABLY GOOD RECORD OF NOT BEHAVING SO RECKLESSLY AS TO DAMAGE THOSE PROVIDING IMPORTANT SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY. GIVEN THE STRENGTH OF FEELING EXPRESSED BY THE TAXI OPERATORS AND REFLECTED BY UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS IT IS NOT UNREASONABLE THAT THESE MEASURES SHOULD NOW BE RE-EXAMINED.+

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## NEED FOR MODIFICATIONS AGREED

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THE ADMINISTRATION ACCEPTS THAT THE TAXI POLICY PACKAGE NEEDS MODIFICATIONS TO RENDER IT ACCEPTABLE AND TO PLACE THE TAXI IN ITS CORRECT PLACE IN THE TRANSPORT SCENE, SAID THE HON ALAN SCOTT, SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT, ALTHOUGH IT BELIEVES THAT THE PACKAGE IS BASICALLY RIGHT IN ITS APPROACH.

MR SCOTT WAS SPEAKING IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL WHERE HE SAID THAT OFFICIAL MEMBERS WOULD NOT VOTE FOR THE TWO BILLS - THE MOTOR VEHICLES (FIRST REGISTRATION TAX) (AMENDMENT) BILL 1984 AND THE ROAD TRAFFIC (REGISTRATION AND LICENSING OF VEHICLES) REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 1984.

+IT FOLLOWS, AS DR FANG AND MR PETER WONG AMONG OTHERS, HAVE URGED THAT THE VARIOUS PROPOSALS IN AND RELATED TO THESE BILLS AS OUTLINED IN THEIR INTRODUCTION LAST WEEK AS AN INTERRELATED PACKAGE, SHOULD BE REEXAMINED. THEY WILL HAVE TO BE RESUBMITTED TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION AS A MATTER OF URGENCY- AND THIS WILL BE DONE. ALL CONCERNED SHOULD BE ASSURED THAT THE VIEWS WHICH HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED TODAY WILL BE INCLUDED IN THAT RESUBMISSION,+ SAID MR SCOTT.

HE SAID: +THE ADMINISTRATION BELIEVES THAT THE POLICY PACKAGE IS BASICALLY RIGHT IN ITS APPROACH BUT OBVIOUSLY NEEDS SUITABLE MODIFICATIONS THAT WILL IN DUE COURSE RENDER IT ACCEPTABLE AND PLACE THE TAXI IN ITS CORRECT PLACE IN THE TRANSPORT SCENE, WHILE BEARING IN MIND THE NECESSITY TO SAFEGUARD THE REASONABLE LIVELIHOOD OF TAXI OPERATORS, AND TO ENSURE A STABLE, EFFICIENT AND FAIRLY PRICED INDUSTRY.+

EARLIER IN HIS SPEECH, MR SCOTT EXPLAINED THE NEED FOR THE USE OF TWO PUBLIC REVENUE PROTECTION ORDERS LAST WEEK. THE EXISTING REGULATIONS FOR THE ISSUE OF LICENCES PROVIDE THAT UP TO FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THE DUE DATE OF EXPIRY OF A CURRENT LICENCE IT MAY BE RENEWED FOR UP TO ONE YEAR FROM THE DATE OF EXPIRY.

ADDITIONALLY, ANY VEHICLE OWNER CAN CANCEL HIS LICENCE AT ANY TIME, RECEIVE A PROPORTIONATE REFUND AND IMMEDIATELY TAKE OUT A NEW LICENCE FOR A FULL YEAR AT THE CURRENT RATE.

IF A REVENUE PROTECTION ORDER HAD NOT BEEN MADE, VIRTUALLY ALL PRESENT LICENSED TAXI OWNERS WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE, IN GREATER OR LESSER DEGREE, AND ENTIRELY PROPERLY WITHIN THE REGULATIONS, TO RENEW THEIR LICENCES AT THE OLD RATES FOR UP TO A YEAR OR MORE, SUBSEQUENT TO THE EVENTUAL ENACTMENT OF THE LEGISLATION, AFTER DEBATE AND AMENDMENT, SAID MR SCOTT.

A SIMILAR ORDER WAS MADE WITH REGARD TO FIRST REGISTRATION TAX TO PREVENT NEW VEHICLES BEING BROUGHT FORWARD QUICKLY IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS FOR REGISTRATION AT THE OLD RATES.

+THE ADMINISTRATION COMPLETELY ACCEPTS THAT USING REVENUE PROTECTION ORDERS IN THIS INSTANCE HAS CAUSED ACUTE PRESENTATIONAL PROBLEMS, NOTWITHSTANDING THE VALID REASONS FOR SO DOING,+ HE SAID.

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MR SCOTT REPEATED THAT THE MEASURES WERE NOT DESIGNED TO INCREASE REVENUE - BUT TO PROTECT IT. THE FREEZE ON THE ISSUE OF URBAN TAXI LICENCE FOR TWO YEARS WOULD HAVE RESULTED IN A LOSS OF REVENUE OF ABOUT \$176 MILLION. THIS LOSS WAS TO BE BALANCED BY THE INCREASES IN FIRST REGISTRATION TAX AND ANNUAL LICENCE FEES. THE RESULTING INCREASE IN TAXI OPERATING COSTS WOULD BE MET BY ABOUT 7.5 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL 17 PER CENT INCREASE IN TAXI FARES.

THE 17 PER CENT INCREASE WOULD STILL LEAVE HONG KONG WITH PROBABLY THE CHEAPEST TAXI SERVICE IN THE WORLD, HE SAID.

IT IS NOT TRUE, SAID MR SCOTT, AS HAD BEEN REPORTED, THAT THE ADMINISTRATION REGARDS TAXIS AS A LUXURY, OR THAT THEY ARE NOT NECESSARY, OR THAT THEY SHOULD BE REDUCED IN NUMBER.

MR SCOTT SAID THAT THE TAXI TRADE WAS NOT A HOMOGENOUS GROUP. HE DETAILED THE CONSULTATION EFFORTS THAT WERE MADE IN FORMULATING POLICY - INVOLVING BOTH THE TRADE, DISTRICT BOARDS AND OTHERS. REGRETTABLY, HE SAID, THE DIRECT QUESTION OF SHOULD TAXI TAX AND ANNUAL LICENCE FEES BE INCREASED COULD NOT BE POSED TO DISTRICT BOARDS AS THIS WOULD HAVE CAUSED THE KIND OF PROBLEMS WITH REGARD TO REVENUE MENTIONED EARLIER.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF THE TRADE MADE IT DIFFICULT TO GATHER A SATISFACTORY OVERALL PICTURE OF EXPENDITURE AND REVENUE AND CLAIMS FOR FARE RISES WERE OFTEN NOT SUPPORTED WITH GREAT DETAIL BY WAY OF REPORT OR SURVEY.

ON THE USE OF THE TERM +PERSONALISED TRANSPORT+ MR SCOTT SAID THAT THE POINT BEING MADE WAS THAT TAXIS ARE NOT IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS PUBLIC TRANSPORT WHICH HAS CONCESSIONARY RATES OF TAXES AND LICENCES.

+THE TAXI TO A VERY LARGE EXTENT ACTS AS A SORT OF PRIVATE HIRE CAR OR SUBSTITUTE FOR PRIVATE CAR,+ HE SAID.

+I EMPHASISE THAT THIS DOES NOT DENY THEIR ROLE AS AN ADJUNCT TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT BUT IT DOES NOT PUT THEM IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS BUSES OR RAILWAYS.+

THERE HAD BEEN VERY LARGE INVESTMENT IN THE TRANSPORT NETWORK, HE SAID. +IT IS INEVITABLE THAT THE COMMUNITY'S INVESTMENT IN THE NETWORK REQUIRES, NOTWITHSTANDING THE ARGUMENTS ABOUT FREE ENTERPRISE AND UNRESTRICTED COMPETITION, A DEGREE OF ALLOCATION BY PRIORITIES.+

SUMMING UP, MR SCOTT SAID THAT THE ADMINISTRATION ACCEPTS THAT THE TIMING, LACK OF GRADUALISM, AND PRESENTATION OF THE MEASURES HAVE CAUSED GREAT CONCERN AMONG UNOFFICIALS WHO HAVE EXPLAINED FULLY THEIR REASONS FOR OPPOSING THE BILLS.

+THIS IS THE VERY REASON WHY THEY AND WE SIT IN THIS COUNCIL, THAT LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SHOULD BE EXAMINED AND DEBATED AFTER UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS HAVE HEARD PUBLIC OPINION AND EXPRESSED THEIR OWN OPINIONS AND SOUGHT AMENDMENTS AS NECESSARY AND VOTED ACCORDINGLY IF NECESSARY.+

TAXI PROPOSALS SEEN AS UNREASONABLE BURDEN  
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IT WAS THE UNANIMOUS VIEW OF THE UNOFFICIALS THAT THE PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS TO THE TAXI TRADE AS A WHOLE REPRESENTED AN UNREASONABLE BURDEN TO MANY TAXI OPERATORS AND DID NOT TAKE ADEQUATE ACCOUNT OF THE COMPLEX POSITION AND PROBLEMS OF THE TAXI TRADE, DR THE HON HARRY FANG SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

DR FANG HEADED A PARTY OF UNOFFICIALS WHO SPOKE AGAINST THE MOTOR VEHICLES (FIRST REGISTRATION TAX) (AMENDMENT) BILL 1984, AND THE ROAD TRAFFIC (REGISTRATION AND LICENSING OF VEHICLES) REGULATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 1984.

+IN THE HEAT OF THE SITUATION IT IS VERY POSSIBLE THAT SOME OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FINDINGS AND INTENTIONS HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD,+ DR FANG SAID.

+BUT THERE IS MISUNDERSTANDING TOO ON THE ADMINISTRATION'S SIDE AND I BELIEVE THAT IT IS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION TO SHOW THAT THE PROPOSED MEASURES ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE.

+IN OUR VIEW THEY HAVE FAILED TO DO SO AND FOR THIS REASON THE UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS THIS AFTERNOON PROPOSE TO OPPOSE THESE BILLS,+ HE ADDED.

HE OBSERVED THAT THERE WERE VALUABLE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED.

+THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MISJUDGED THE IMPACT OF THE PACKAGE PROPOSALS AND THEIR RECEPTION BY THE TRADE.

+CONSENSUS SUPPORT IS CONTINUALLY STRESSED, AND RIGHTLY SO, AS THE STRENGTH OF OUR GOVERNMENT. THIS HAS NEVER PROVED MORE IMPORTANT THAN NOW, GIVEN OUR PRESENT DELICATE POSITION,+ HE SAID.

HE URGED THE ADMINISTRATION TO HAVE A SERIOUS RE-THINK OF THE ENTIRE PACKAGE, NOT AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS AND CAPITULATION BUT AS AN EARNEST INDICATION OF AN OPEN GOVERNMENT SENSITIVE TO PUBLIC REACTION AND EVER WILLING TO SEEK JUST AND FAIR SOLUTIONS TO WHATEVER PROBLEMS MIGHT CONFRONT THE COMMUNITY.

+IT SAYS MUCH FOR OUR STYLE OF GOVERNMENT THAT THE UNOFFICIALS OF THE COUNCIL CAN, THIS AFTERNOON, HAVE A MATERIAL SAY IN THE FUTURE OF THE TWO BILLS NOW BEFORE COUNCIL AND I HOPE THAT THE VALIDITY OF OUR RESERVATIONS WILL BE CLEAR TO ALL,+ HE SAID.

DR FANG THANKED THE ACTING GOVERNOR FOR HIS PROMPT DECISION, IN RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST OF THE UNOFFICIALS, TO CONVENE A SPECIAL SITTING THIS AFTERNOON TO RESUME THE DEBATE ON THE TWO BILLS.

HE SAID, +THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO DISCUSS THE CIVIL DISORDER WHICH FOLLOWED IN THE WAKE OF THE TAXI-OPERATORS' AGITATION.

+I EXPECT THERE WILL BE AN ENQUIRY AND I HOPE, IN DUE COURSE, A REPORT WILL BE MADE TO THIS COUNCIL.+

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HE ADDED THAT THE HOOLIGANISM AND VIOLENCE WHICH TOOK PLACE ON JANUARY 13 WERE A SOBERING REMINDER OF THE FRAGILITY OF OUR SOCIETY.

+THE RESTRAINT AND GOOD SENSE EXERCISED BY THE ROYAL HONG KONG POLICE FORCE CARRIED THE DAY AND I BELIEVE I SPEAK FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS FOR THE UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THIS COUNCIL, WHEN I EXPRESS OUR ADMIRATION AND APPRECIATION OF THEIR DISCIPLINE AND PERFORMANCE IN A VERY TRYING SITUATION,+ HE SAID.

TURNING TO THE PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS TO THE TAXI-OPERATORS, HE SAID THAT WHILE HE APPRECIATED THE NEED FOR THE REVENUE PROTECTION ORDERS, HE WAS BOUND TO OBSERVE THAT NO ALLOWANCE WAS MADE FOR A NUMBER OF HARDSHIP SITUATIONS, ONE BEING TAXI-OPERATORS WHO HAD RECENTLY TENDERED SUCCESSFULLY FOR LICENCES ON THE BASIS OF THE PREVIOUS FEE LEVELS BUT WHO HAD NOT YET REGISTERED THEIR VEHICLES.

+WE ARE TOLD THERE ARE SOME 873 VEHICLES IN THIS SITUATION,+ HE SAID.

+AND THE INCREASES ALSO STRUCK PARTICULARLY HARD AT OWNER-OPERATORS DUE TO REPLACE THEIR TAXIS.+

+MOREOVER, THE ADMINISTRATION'S DECLARATION THAT TAXIS ARE TO BE REGARDED AS A FORM OF PERSONALISED TRANSPORT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE APPLIED CONSISTENTLY SINCE TAXIS ARE REGARDED AS PUBLIC VEHICLES FOR FARE CONTROL PURPOSES AND AS PRIVATE VEHICLES FOR TAX PURPOSES.

+FINALLY, THE 7.5 PER CENT ASSESSMENT OF THE INCREASED COST TO THE TRADE SEEMS HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE,+ HE ADDED.

ON THE REACTIONS OF THE TAXI TRADE, HE SAID, +WHILE THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY CHOSE TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR DISSATISFACTION IS TO BE REGRETTED, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT OF THE SINCERITY AND DEPTH OF FEELING OF INDIVIDUAL TAXI-OPERATORS AT WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THREATENING FORCES TO THEIR LIVELIHOOD.

+THEIR PREDICAMENT APPEARS TO HAVE ATTRACTED GENERAL PUBLIC SYMPATHY. MY UNOFFICIAL COLLEAGUES AND I COULD NOT FAIL BUT REACT TO THIS GROUNDSWELL OF PUBLIC OPINION,+ HE SAID.

HE POINTED OUT THAT ALL ASPECTS OF THE PACKAGE WERE TOUCHED ON AT LONG MEETINGS WITH THE TAXI TRADE REPRESENTATIVES.

HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED WITH APPRECIATION THE READINESS WITH WHICH THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT MADE HIMSELF AVAILABLE TO ASSIST THE UNOFFICIALS.

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PROPOSED TAX RISES 'OUT OF STEP'

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DR THE HON FRANCIS TIEN POINTED OUT THAT THE PROPOSED TAX INCREASES FOR TAXIS +SEEK TO REGULATE AND REFORM THE TAXI TRADE BY FISCAL MEANS AND RUN COUNTER TO A BASIC PRINCIPLE ON WHICH OUR FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM DEPENDS+.

+THEY DRAMATICALLY CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE TAXI TRADE MUST OPERATE AND THEY ARE OUT OF STEP WITH AN IDEA WHICH WE CHERISH IN HONG KONG, NAMELY THE RIGHT TO CONDUCT BUSINESS IN A STABLE ENVIRONMENT WITH A MINIMUM OF STATE INTERVENTION,+ HE SAID, IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY.

+THE BEST GOVERNMENT IS THE LEAST GOVERNMENT AND THE PROPOSALS BY THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT ARE A DEPARTURE FROM OUR WELL-TRIED FREE MARKET SYSTEM BECAUSE OF THE DISTURBANCE TO THE NORMAL ORDER OF EVERYDAY LIFE CAUSED BY THEIR SUDDENNESS AND SEVERITY.

+THEY OFFER A BROAD-BRUSH SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM OF GREAT COMPLEXITY,+ HE ADDED.

HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT SURPRISED THAT PUBLIC SYMPATHY WAS ON THE SIDE OF THE TAXI TRADE IN THIS CASE.

HE DEPLORED THE INCONVENIENCE WHICH THE PUBLIC HAD SUFFERED IN THE PAST WEEK AND ABOVE ALL, THE SCENES OF VIOLENCE WHICH WE WITNESSED LAST FRIDAY.

+THE JOINT EFFORTS AND SWIFT ACTION TAKEN TO DEFUSE A POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATION MUST BE COMMENDED.

+I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE POLICE FORCE IN HANDLING THE UNRULY ELEMENTS ON THE STREETS OF KOWLOON SO EFFICIENTLY,+ HE SAID.

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+TAXIS SHOULD BE SEEN AS UTILITY+

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THE HON ALEX WU URGED AT THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY THAT +THE VIABILITY OF TAXIS BE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED AND BE GIVEN THE SAME ATTENTION AS THOSE OF OTHER PUBLIC UTILITIES SO THAT THEY MAY CONTINUE TO SERVE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WHEN THEY NEED THEM+.

HE FELT THAT THE MEASURES PROPOSED IN THE TWO BILLS WERE DEFENSIBLE ONLY IN STATISTICAL TERMS.

+IT IS ONE THING TO GATHER INFORMATION BY STATISTICAL MEANS. BUT IT IS QUITE ANOTHER TO BASE PUBLIC POLICY ON IT TO THE EXTENT OF DISMISSING AS IRRATIONAL AND THEREFORE UNACCEPTABLE, ANY OPPOSITION WHICH CLAIMS NO BETTER CREDENTIALS THAN COMMON SENSE AND EXPERIENCE,+ HE SAID.

/+WE ARE .....

+WE ARE IN SOME DANGER OF FALLING UNDER GOVERNMENT BY EXPERTS WHICH IS AS BAD IN ITS WAY AS GOVERNMENT BY DEMAGOGUES,+ HE ADDED.

HE DISAGREED WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT TAXIS WERE NO LONGER ESSENTIAL BECAUSE ONLY SEVEN PER CENT OF THE PEOPLE SURVEYED SAID THAT THEY USED TAXIS FOR URGENT PURPOSES.

+PLAYING ABOUT WITH NAMES DOES NOT SEEM TO ME TO BE ANY MORE CONVINCING,+ HE ADDED.

+WHETHER WE CALL IT PUBLIC TRANSPORT OR PERSONALISED PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WE CANNOT GET AWAY FROM THE FACT THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND DESIRABLE FOR A GREAT MANY MORE.+

HE BELIEVED THAT THE RELIANCE ON TAXIS HAD INCREASED AND WOULD BE INCREASING AS MORE AND MORE PRIVATE CARS WERE BEING TAXED OFF THE ROADS.

+WHILE I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THERE IS SCOPE FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT MIXTURE, I DO NOT THINK WE WOULD GET IT RIGHT IF WE APPROACH IT FROM THIS 'WE KNOW WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU EVEN IF YOU DON'T' POINT OF VIEW,+ HE STRESSED.

REFERRING TO THE PUBLICATION BY A NEWSPAPER OF THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT'S SPEECH IN FULL AND THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS THAT 'IN THESE TIMES, WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN, THE SMALL PRINT TENDS TO BE IGNORED AND GUT REACTIONS WIN THE DAY', MR WU SAID THAT RAISED THE IMPORTANT QUESTION OF PRACTICAL GOVERNMENT.

+IS IT SERIOUSLY SUGGESTING THAT IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT A PIECE OF GOVERNMENT POLICY THE MAN IN THE STREET HAS GOT TO READ A 4 000 WORD SPEECH COMPLETE WITH STATISTICAL TABLES AND FOOTNOTES,+ HE ASKED.

+THE HONG KONG MAN-IN-THE-STREET IS NOT THE FIRST AND WILL NOT BE THE LAST TO IGNORE THE SMALL PRINT AND TO REACT FROM THE GUT, ESPECIALLY WHEN HIS LIVELIHOOD IS INVOLVED,+ HE WARNED.

+IT IS THE DUTY OF ADMINISTRATORS TO TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT WHEN THEY INTRODUCE NEW POLICIES AND I DO NOT BELIEVE THEY DID SO SUFFICIENTLY ON THIS OCCASION,+ HE SAID.

BILLS OPPOSED ON ACCOUNT OF CONTENTS AND FORM

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REV THE HON PATRICK MCGOVERN SAID THAT HIS OPPOSITION TO THE TWO BILLS WAS PROMPTED BY THE CONTENTS, AND BY THE FACT THAT THEY WERE PRESENTED IN PACKAGE FORM.

+THE CONTENTS OF THE PACKAGE ARE NOT NECESSARILY RELATED ISSUES OTHER THAN THAT THEY ARE CONCERNED WITH TAXIS,+ HE SAID.

+THE FACT THAT THEY WERE TIED INTO A PACKAGE, IF I MAY MIX MY METAPHORS, TURNED THEM INTO A CAN OF WORMS,+ HE SAID.

HE POINTED OUT THAT THE PROBLEMS OF TOO MANY TAXIS ON OVERCROWDED ROADS HAD BEEN SOLVED BY THE GAZETTED RESOLUTION TEMPORARILY LIMITING THE NUMBER OF URBAN LICENCES.

+FROM THE OPERATORS PREMIUM POINT OF VIEW IT APPEARS THE SUPPLY OF TAXIS IS NOW ENOUGH TO MEET DEMAND. THAT TOO HAS BEEN SOLVED BY THE LIMITATION OF NUMBERS,+ HE ADDED.

THE PROBLEM THAT THE TAXI TRADE WAS BECOMING UNPROFITABLE HAD BEEN SOLVED, OR PARTLY SOLVED, BY THE OTHER GAZETTED RESOLUTION TABLED LAST WEDNESDAY BY WHICH TAXI FARES WOULD BE INCREASED.

+AS THE PROBLEMS OF NUMBERS HAVE BEEN SOLVED BY RESOLUTION, THERE IS OBVIOUSLY NO NEED TO INTRODUCE FISCAL MEASURES TO RESTRICT NUMBERS,+ HE ARGUED.

MAINTAINING THAT A TAXI WAS A PUBLIC VEHICLE, HE SAID +IF IT IS TREATED AS SUCH, WHEN TAXI PROBLEMS ARE RE-EXAMINED IT WILL AVOID A LOT OF CONFUSION AND DISAGREEMENT.+

+IF THE IDEA THAT A TAXI IS A PRIVATE CAR REARS ITS HEAD AGAIN, THAT IDEA SHOULD BE FIRMLY SCOTCHED,+ HE STRESSED.

HE NOTED THAT THE REPORTING IN THE MEDIA OF THE PROGRESS OF THE BILL HAD BEEN SOMEWHAT DISTORTED.

+APART FROM THE TIMING, ALL THAT IS HAPPENING TODAY IS THE ORDINARY CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS.

+IT IS ALSO, I HOPE, A DEMONSTRATION THAT THE LIMITED DEMOCRACY OF AN APPOINTED UNOFFICIAL MEMBERSHIP OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL CAN WORK.

+THE ROLE OF LEGCO IS TO DEBATE BILLS SENT TO US BY EXCO. IF WE THINK EXCO HAS BEEN BADLY INFORMED OR IS MAKING AN ERROR OF JUDGMENT, IT IS OUR DUTY TO PUT A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL CONVINCING THE ADMINISTRATION THAT THERE IS A BETTER COURSE OF ACTION TO BE PURSUED,+ HE SAID.

OPPOSITION FOLLOWED CAREFUL DEBATE

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THE DECISION OF THE UNOFFICIALS TO OPPOSE THE BILLS WAS NOT A HASTY OR EMOTIONAL DECISION, BUT ONE THAT WAS TAKEN AFTER CAREFUL DEBATE, RECOGNISING THAT THE OVERALL INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE THE FOREMOST CONSIDERATION, THE HON PETER C. WONG SAID.

+IT WAS AN INDEPENDENT DECISION TAKEN WITHOUT ANY INTERVENTION BY THE ADMINISTRATION,+ HE ADDED.

HE NOTED THAT THE WHOLE INCIDENT WAS REGRETTABLE BUT HE FELT THAT IT WOULD NOT BE RIGHT TO BLAME IT ON ONE PERSON.

+IT WAS A GOVERNMENT DECISION AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS ACTION.+

HE POINTED OUT THAT THE TAXI DISPUTE SERVED AS A TIMELY REMINDER THAT HONG KONG WAS AS SUSCEPTIBLE AS EVER TO CIVIL DISTURBANCES.

+IT BEHOVES THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE ITS MACHINERY TO GAUGE PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND REACTION,+ HE SAID.

+IT IS TRUE THAT INDUSTRIAL ACTION WITHIN THE LAW IS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT IN ANY FREE SOCIETY.

+BUT IF HONG KONG IS TO MAINTAIN ITS STABILITY AND PROSPERITY, CAUTION AND RESTRAINT MUST BE EXERCISED WHEN ANY ACTION TAKEN IS LIKELY TO AFFECT THE COMMUNITY AND MAY LEAD TO DISASTROUS AND UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES,+ HE ADDED.

HE GAVE AN ACCOUNT OF HOW THE 12-MEMBER TEAM OF UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS HANDLED THE TAXI DISPUTE ON FRIDAY.

+OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS, UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS HAVE REVIEWED CAREFULLY THE RAPID EVENTS THAT HAD OCCURRED - A POST-MORTEM OF AN UNPRECEDENTED EPISODE. I REMAIN CONVINCED THAT THE TEAM HAD MADE THE CORRECT DECISION,+ HE SAID.

HE LISTED HIS FOLLOWING REASONS FOR OPPOSING THE BILLS:

- \* THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, IN PARTICULAR THE TAXI INDUSTRY, WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY THE SUDDEN HEFTY INCREASES IN FEES AND CHARGES.
- \* THE ARGUMENTS PUT FORTH FOR SUCH INCREASES WERE FAR FROM CONVINCING.
- \* IT APPEARS THAT CONSULTATION HAD NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH.
- \* ON THE NUMBER OF PASSENGERS CARRIED BY TAXIS, THE MTR AND THE TWO BUS COMPANIES, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO REFUTE THAT TAXIS WERE NOT PROVIDING A USEFUL PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE.

- \* THE POINT THAT TAXIS WERE NOT ECONOMIC ROAD USERS WAS WELL KNOWN BUT THAT DID NOT FOLLOW THAT SWIFT AND DRASTIC INCREASES WITHOUT WARNING HAD TO BE EFFECTED AT A STROKE OF THE PEN.
- \* TAXIS WERE DESCRIBED AS A FORM OF 'PERSONALISED' PUBLIC TRANSPORT BUT THE FACT REMAINED THAT THEY WERE A FORM OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND SHOULD NOT BE DENIED IN TOTAL ANY PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT ACCORDED TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT.
- \* ALTHOUGH A SUBSTANTIAL PERCENTAGE OF TAXI TRIPS WERE FOR SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL PURPOSES, IT DID NOT IN ANY WAY ALTER THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NATURE OF TAXIS.
- \* THE PROPOSED INCREASES IN THEIR PRESENT FORM WERE EXCESSIVE AND INEQUITABLE AND THEREFORE UNACCEPTABLE.

HE SAID THAT JUDGED FROM WHAT WAS REPORTED IN THE MEDIA, PUBLIC OPINION WAS AGAINST THE NEW MEASURES.

+MY ADVICE TO THE ADMINISTRATION IS TO HEED PUBLIC OPINION, RE-ASSESS THE WHOLE SITUATION IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED, AND THEN COME BACK TO THIS COUNCIL WITH A MORE BALANCED AND EQUITABLE PROPOSAL AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME,+ HE SAID.

+I WILL BE HAPPY TO SUPPORT ANY REVISED MEASURES PROVIDED THEY ARE FAIR AND REASONABLE.+

HE PRAISED THE POLICE AND STRESSED THAT THE DISTURBANCES THAT ERUPTED ON FRIDAY EVENING MUST BE STRONGLY CONDEMNED AND THE CULPRITS SHOULD BE SEVERELY DEALT WITH ACCORDING TO LAW.

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TAXI TAX AND REGISTRATION FEE INCREASES UNTIMELY  
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THE HON WONG LAM SAID WHILE HE AGREED THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE EFFECTIVE STEPS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF TRAFFIC CONGESTION IN HONG KONG, HE WAS OF THE OPINION THAT ANY MEASURES ADOPTED HAD TO BE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS WHEN HONG KONG WAS IN A STATE OF POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY AND ITS ECONOMY WAS ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO IMPROVE.

+CARE MUST BE TAKEN NOT TO GIVE TOO SERIOUS A BLOW TO THE PEOPLE IN EVERY TRADE AND EVERY STRATUM,+ HE STRESSED.

HE CONSIDERED THE DECISION TO INCREASE TAXI REGISTRATION TAX AND LICENCE FEES AS UNTIMELY.

+BECAUSE OF THE INCREASING OPERATING COST IN RECENT YEARS, TAXI OPERATORS ARE ALREADY HAVING CONFLICTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OVER THE QUESTION OF A FARE INCREASE.

/+THE INCREASE .....

+THE INCREASE IN TAX AND LICENCE FEES ONLY WORSENS THE SITUATION AND NEEDS TO BE REVIEWED,+ HE SAID.

HE SAID HE PERSONALLY BELIEVED THAT THE TWO BILLS WERE INTENDED AS A MEANS TO SOLVE THE TRAFFIC PROBLEM AND NOT TO INCREASE REVENUE.

+THE MORATORIUM ON FRESH LICENCES WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS AGREED UPON EARLIER WOULD MEAN A CONSIDERABLE LOSS AS FAR AS REVENUE IS CONCERNED, AND I WONDER IF THE TAX INCREASES PROPOSED BY THE BILLS COULD OFFSET SUCH A LOSS+ HE SAID.

+AS FOR THE QUESTION OF CONSULTATION, WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CONSULT THE PUBLIC ON BROAD PRINCIPLES BEFORE INTRODUCING A BILL, I AM SURE THAT THERE WILL BE CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY IF THE GOVERNMENT IS TO CONDUCT PUBLIC CONSULTATION BEFORE THE ACTUAL AMOUNT OF TAX INCREASE PROPOSED IS PUT BEFORE THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,+ HE ADDED.

HOWEVER, HE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT THE GOVERNMENT'S ARGUMENT THAT TAXIS WERE NOT A MEANS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT.

+BY CHARGING TENS OR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR EACH TAXI LICENCE ISSUED, THE AUTHORITIES HAVE APPARENTLY MADE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN TAXIS AND PRIVATE CARS AND ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR DIFFERENCES.

+OTHERWISE, NO TAXI LICENCE SHOULD HAVE BEEN ISSUED AND ALL PRIVATE CARS SHOULD HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO DO BUSINESS,+ HE SAID.

HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE WERE STILL MANY WAYS WHICH TAXIS COULD JUSTIFY THEIR WORTH AS A SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC.

AS YET, THEY COULD NOT BE ENTIRELY REPLACED BY ANY OTHER MODE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT, HE SAID.

+THE GOVERNMENT MAY ENCOURAGE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO USE HIGH-CAPACITY MODES OF TRANSPORT, BUT THEY SHOULD ALSO BE GIVEN A CHOICE,+ HE STRESSED. +IF THE GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS THAT THERE ARE ALREADY TOO MANY TAXIS AND THAT THESE TAXIS ON THE ROAD ARE CAUSING TRAFFIC CONGESTION, THEN THE BEST DIRECT METHOD OF DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM IS TO STOP ISSUING MORE TAXI LICENCES,+ HE ADDED.

HE ALSO FELT THAT THE TAX INCREASES PROPOSED BY THE TWO BILLS WERE TOO LARGE.

BUT HE SAID THAT HE FOUND IT HARD TO SYMPATHISE WITH THE TAXI OPERATORS WHO USED THEIR CARS TO BLOCK THE ROADS.

+NO GOVERNMENT POLICY CAN BE ONE HUNDRED PER CENT SATISFACTORY TO ALL. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO VOICE OUR DISCONTENT, AND IT IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS FOR TAXI OPERATORS TO GO ON STRIKE AND BLOCK THE ROADS,+ HE SAID.

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METHOD OF DELIVERING TAXI PACKAGE CRITICISED

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THE HON CHARLES YEUNG SAID THAT EVEN IF THE PRINCIPLE UNDERLYING THE PROPOSED PACKAGE COULD NOT BE FAULTED AND STRIDENT IMPACT OF THE PACKAGE WAS DEFENSIBLE, THE METHOD OF DELIVERY LEFT A LOT TO BE DESIRED.

SPEAKING IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY, HE SAID THAT HONG KONG IS GOVERNED BY CONSENSUS.

THE SYMPATHY OF THE PUBLIC, MR YEUNG SAID, WAS WITH THE TAXI TRADE MAINLY ON THE POINT OF THE +UNPRECEDENTED AND SUDDEN MANIFOLD INCREASE IN DIRECT TAXATION ON THE TRADE.+

BUT THE PUBLIC, AS FAR AS HE COULD ASCERTAIN, DID NOT SUPPORT INDUSTRIAL ACTION TAKEN BY THE TAXI OPERATORS.

+HOWEVER, THE PUBLIC RECOGNISED THE FINANCIAL IMPACT THE MEASURES WOULD HAVE ON THE TAXI DRIVERS.+

MR YEUNG SAID THAT A FREEZE ON THE NUMBER OF TAXIS WAS JUSTIFIABLE.

+BUT TO EMPLOY FINANCIAL STRICTURE AS A MEANS OF CONSTRAINT ON TAXI OPERATION TO EASE ROAD CONGESTION WOULD NEED VERY GOOD REASONS TO SUSTAIN IT,+ HE SAID.

A TAXI LICENCE WAS A FORM OF INVESTMENT OR PROPERTY, BY VIRTUE OF THE PRICE PAID FOR IT EITHER FROM THE GOVERNMENT OR IN THE MARKET. SINCE TAXI FARES WERE CONTROLLED AND OPERATORS COULD NOT RELY ON MARKET FORCES, THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE FAIR AND REASONABLE TO THEM.

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT, WITHOUT VERY COGENT REASON, DEPRIVE THE TAXI OWNERS OF JUST RETURNS ON INVESTMENT, NOR SHOULD IT LOWER THE TAXI DRIVERS LIVING STANDARD, HE SAID.

MR YEUNG SAID IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THERE WAS A COMMUNICATION GAP WHICH LED TO MISUNDERSTANDING AND IRRITATION.

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'DIVISIVE PROPOSALS' NEED CAREFUL HANDLING

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DR THE HON HO KAM-FAI SAID THAT AT THIS MOMENT OF POLITICAL DELICACY IN HONG KONG, ANY LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS LIKELY TO BRING ABOUT A DIVISIVE EFFECT ON THE COMMUNITY SHOULD BE HANDLED CAREFULLY.

+FOR THE SMOOTH AND EFFICIENT IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY DECISIONS, THOROUGH CONSULTATION WITH PEOPLE WHO WILL BE DIRECTLY AFFECTED IS ESSENTIAL.

+IN THIS RESPECT, THE VIEWS AND REACTIONS OF THE TAXI USERS AND TAXI OPERATORS SHOULD BE INVITED NOT ONLY ON THE BROAD PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY ON THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE POLICY PROPOSALS,+ HE SAID.

+TAX AND FARE INCREASES IN TRANSPORT POLICY ARE BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES, AND SHOULD WARRANT MORE WIDESPREAD PUBLIC CONSULTATION THAN THAT CONDUCTED IN THE CASE OF THESE TWO BILLS.+

DR HO SAID THAT HE DID NOT SUBSCRIBE TO THE VIEW THAT TAXIS WERE A FORM OF PERSONALISED TRANSPORT AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE TREATED AS PRIVATE CARS.

+IT IS TRUE THAT INCREASES IN PASSENGER PATRONAGE OF TAXIS BEING MORE THAN TWICE THAT OF ALL OTHER FORMS OF MASS PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN THE RECENT YEARS IS DUE TO THE LOW TAXI FARE STRUCTURE.

+BUT MORE SIGNIFICANT IS THE FACT THAT DEMAND FOR TAXIS CONTINUED TO GROW BECAUSE OTHER MODES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT ARE UNABLE TO MEET ALL TRAVELLING NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY,+ HE SAID.

HE LISTED THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE TO WHOM TAXIS ARE THEIR ONLY MEANS OF TRAVELLING.

+TAXIS ARE THEREFORE NOT MERELY SUPPLEMENTING, BUT COMPLEMENTING OTHER FORMS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN PERFORMING AN IMPORTANT ROLE OF KEEPING HONG KONG MOVING.

+IN ADDITION, IN MANY PARTS OF THE TERRITORY, TAXIS ARE RENDERING A VERY MUCH NEEDED FEEDER SERVICE IN LINKING UP MAJOR TRANSPORT INTERCHANGES,+ HE OBSERVED.

ON THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED INCREASES, DR HO SAID, +THESE BILLS IF ENACTED WILL CREATE A FINANCIAL BURDEN FAR TOO HEFTY AND FAR TOO DRASTIC FOR THE TAXI OPERATORS RESULTING IN A THREAT TO THEIR LIVELIHOOD.+

+INCREASE IN TAXATION MUST BE GRADUAL AND CONGRUENT TO THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF THE TRADE CONCERNED, SUDDEN HUGE INCREASES WILL LEAD TO RESISTANCE, AS HAPPENED IN THIS CASE,+ HE ADDED.

DEBATE SEEN AS VICTORY FOR GOVERNMENT SYSTEM  
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ENDORING THE VIEWS OF HIS UNOFFICIAL COLLEAGUES, THE HON BILL BROWN SAID, +IN THIS CASE, WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THIS DEBATE, PERHAPS THE VICTORY GOES TO OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT WHICH ALLOWS UNOFFICIALS TO OPPOSE BILLS THEY BELIEVE REQUIRE FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY THE ADMINISTRATION.+

+ABOVE ALL, HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THE PUBLIC WILL ENDORSE THE OUTCOME AS A VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE,+ HE ADDED.

MR BROWN NOTED THAT THE MEASURES PROPOSED IN THE TWO BILLS WERE NOT INTENDED FOR RAISING REVENUE AS THE TAXATION ASPECTS WERE MERELY PART OF THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE TRANSPORT POLICY.

ON THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS MERELY GAVE IN TO PRESSURE BY ADOPTING THE STAND THEY HAD TAKEN, HE SAID, +THIS IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE, FOR WERE IT TO BE TRUE IT COULD HAVE MOST UNFORTUNATE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE CONDUCT OF OUR AFFAIRS.+

HE NOTED THAT THE EVENTS OF LAST WEEK MIGHT WELL BE VIEWED BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN THE LIGHT OF PHRASES SUCH AS 'CAVING INTO PRESSURE', 'GIVING INTO BLACKMAIL' AND WITH NATURAL CONCERN AS TO THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES.

+IT WAS UNFORTUNATE, BUT I ACCEPT UNAVOIDABLE, THAT THE NEED FOR REVENUE PROTECTION ORDERS NECESSITATED THESE BILLS BEING INTRODUCED WITHOUT WARNING SO THAT THE CONTENTS CAME AS A SURPRISE TO BOTH THE TAXI TRADE AND TO UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS,+ HE SAID.

MR BROWN THEN QUOTED THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AS SAYING IN HIS SPEECH THAT THIS METHOD OF INTRODUCTION WAS NOT INTENDED TO INDICATE A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

+IT IS A MATTER FOR REGRET THAT UNOFFICIALS WERE DENIED BY EVENTS THE USUAL PERIOD TO STUDY CAREFULLY THE BILLS BEFORE RESUMING THEIR DEBATE ON THE 25TH OF THIS MONTH.

+HAD THEY BEEN ABLE TO DO SO THEIR RESERVATIONS WOULD DOUBTLESS HAVE LED TO MUCH THE SAME RESULT AS WE ANTICIPATE TODAY WITHOUT THE TRAUMA OF THE DISGRACEFUL SCENES OUR CITIZENS WERE FORCED TO SUFFER LAST WEEK.+

HE POINTED OUT THAT DEVELOPMENTS HAD MADE THE NEED TO STUDY THESE PROPOSALS EXTREMELY URGENT AND THE UNOFFICIALS HAD DONE SO WHILE RECEIVING REPRESENTATIONS FROM THOSE AFFECTED.

+IF THERE WERE ANY 'GIVING IN' IT WAS TO THE NEED FOR AN URGENT DECISION RATHER THAN THE CONTENT OF THE DECISION ITSELF, AND I BELIEVE WE ARE ALL GRATEFUL TO THE ADMINISTRATION FOR ACCEPTING OUR SUGGESTION THAT THIS DEBATE BE ADVANCED TO TODAY,+ HE SAID.

+IT WAS, AND IT REMAINS, THE JUDGEMENT OF THE UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THIS COUNCIL THAT IT WAS THE SPEED WITH WHICH THEY REACHED THEIR AGREED POSITION ON THESE BILLS, AND THEIR SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT TO THIS EFFECT, WHICH DEFUSED A DANGEROUS SITUATION,+ HE STRESSED.

+A DANGEROUS SITUATION, I MIGHT ADD, WHICH THREATENED THE VERY STABILITY WE ALL RECOGNISE AS HAVING SUCH SPECIAL IMPORTANCE AT THIS TIME,+.

HE PAID TRIBUTE TO THE POLICE FORCE +WHO REACTED WITH SUCH COMPETENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM TO EVENTS WHICH TOOK MOST OF US BY SURPRISE+.

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BILLS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN AND TAXI FARE INCREASE FROZEN

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THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONSIDER WITHDRAWING THE TWO BILLS AND FREEZING THE INCREASE IN TAXI FARES, PENDING A REVIEW OF THE TAXI POLICY AND EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS, SAID THE HON ANDREW SO.

HE SAID THE SUBJECTS OF TODAY'S DEBATE WERE INOPPORTUNE.

+THE WIDE RANGES OF THE INCREASES HAVE PROVOKED RESENTMENT, WHICH IS CONTRARY TO HONG KONG'S CONSISTENT POLICY OF CARING FOR THE PEOPLE AND TRYING ITS BEST TO MAINTAIN STABILITY.+

MR SO ALSO NOTED THERE WAS A TIME GAP IN THE INCREASE OF 17 PER CENT IN TAXI FARES AND THE INCREASE IN LICENCE FEES.

HE SAID THAT SUCH A FEINT WAS UNFAIR.

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LONG-TERM, GRADUAL TAXI MEASURES PROPOSED

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THE CALL FOR GRADUAL IMPLEMENTATION OF A LONG-TERM TAXI POLICY WAS MADE BY THE HON F.K. HU, IN SPEAKING ON THE TWO BILLS IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY.

THE PROPOSALS NOW CONTAINED IN THE TWO BILLS WERE BOTH ABRUPT AND DRASTIC, MR HU ADDED.

OPPOSING THE BILLS, MR HU SAID THAT THE ROLE OF TAXIS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF OVERALL TRANSPORT POLICY.

TAXIS, HE SAID, WERE +A LUXURIOUS MODE OF TRANSPORT+ CONVENIENT TO THE USER WILLING TO PAY FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF SUCH CONVENIENCE. THE FARES, HE SAID, SHOULD BRING REASONABLE RETURN TO THE TAXI OWNERS AND DRIVERS WHOSE INVESTMENT AND EFFORT MUST BE SUITABLY REWARDED.

/+TAXIS ARE .....

+TAXIS ARE A MEANS OF TRANSPORT WHICH MUST STRICKE A BALANCE AMONG SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC WHO ARE PREPARED TO PAY SUITABLY FOR THE SERVICE, REASONABLE RETURN TO TAXI OWNERS AND DRIVERS WHOSE LIVELIHOOD AND EMPLOYMENT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND WITH DUE CONSIDERATION TO REDUCING CONGESTION OF OUR ROAD SYSTEM.

+THIS IS A LONG-TERM TAXI POLICY WHICH I FULLY SUPPORT,+ HE SAID.

THE TWO BILLS, HE SAID WERE AIMED AT FULFILMENT OF THE LONG-TERM TAXI POLICY, BUT OVERLOOKED THE IMMEDIATE FINANCIAL IMPLICATION AND BURDEN OF THE TAXI OWNERS AND DRIVERS WHO COULD NOT AFFORD THEM.

HE SAID HE WOULD WELCOME RE-INTRODUCTION OF THE BILLS IN A MORE MODERATE FORM ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED -- WITHIN THE SPIRIT OF THE LONG-TERM TAXI POLICY, WHICH HE SUPPORTED.

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TAXI OPERATORS HAD VALID COMPLAINT  
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IN HONG KONG'S FREE ECONOMY, THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES OF PROFITABILITY FOR ANY BUSINESS, BUT TAXI OPERATORS HAD A VALID COMPLAINT ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE INCREASES, THE HON K.C. CHAN SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY.

+BEFORE TENDERING FOR THEIR TAXIS THEY MUST HAVE DONE THEIR COSTING ON A SET OF KNOWN CONDITIONS, SUCH AS TENDER PRICE, CAPITAL AND RECURRENT EXPENSES.

+THE SUDDEN BIG INCREASE THROWS THEIR SUMS OUT OF BALANCE THROUGH NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN,+ HE SAID.

+PERHAPS, AT A GIVEN DATE ALL RECENTLY TENDERED TAXIS SHOULD BE REGISTERED AT THE OLD RATE AND THE NEXT LOT OF TAXI TENDER SHOULD BE GIVEN THE NEW RATE.

+THERE LIE THE TWO KEYS FOR A SOLUTION AND ANY AMENDMENTS OR FUTURE BILLS SHOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE HARDSHIPS OF THE TAXI TRADE AIRED RECENTLY,+ HE SAID.

HE STRESSED THAT THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE, AND ANY INDIVIDUAL, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BILLS.

HE ALSO PRAISED THE POLICE AND OTHER DISCIPLINARY FORCES CONCERNED FOR THEIR PROFESSIONALISM IN HANDLING THE RIOTS AND THE TAXI DRIVERS FOR BEING SO SENSIBLE IN QUICK DISPERSAL OF THEIR TAXIS DURING THE RIOT.

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LOGIC BEHIND TAXI MEASURES CRITICISED

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THE HON STEPHEN CHEONG SAID HE OPPOSED THE TWO BILLS BECAUSE HE COULD NOT RECONCILE THE LOGIC BEHIND THE PROPOSED TAX AND OTHER INCREASES WITH THE LOGIC BEHIND THE PROPOSAL TO IMPOSE A TEMPORARY MORATORIUM ON TAXI LICENCES.

+IN MY OPINION, THE TWO PROPOSALS, IF IMPLEMENTED TOGETHER, WILL GENERATE CONTRADICTIONARY EFFECTS,+ HE SAID.

HE POINTED OUT THAT ACCORDING TO THE TAXI REVIEW REPORT, TAXIS WERE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO ROAD CONGESTION, AND HE FELT THAT THE PROPOSED FISCAL MEASURES WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF GENERATING EVEN GREATER CONGESTION, BECAUSE MORE EMPTY TAXIS WOULD BE CRUISING AROUND THAN AT PRESENT.

TAXIS OPERATORS WERE ALREADY OPERATING ON RELATIVELY THIN PROFIT MARGINS AND ON A KNIFE EDGE OF LIQUIDITY SO THE INCREASED CHARGES WERE UNLIKELY TO BE ABSORBED AND THE PROPOSED INCREASES WERE BOUND TO BE PASSED ON TO CONSUMERS, IN THE FORM OF INCREASES IN FARES.

AT PRESENT, ALREADY 40 PER CENT OF ALL TAXIS WERE CRUISING AROUND EMPTY, HE SAID.

+THIS IMPLIES THAT THE CURRENT LEVEL OF FARES HAS ALREADY GIVEN RISE TO A CERTAIN LEVEL OF CONSUMER RESISTANCE.

+IF FARES ARE TO BE FURTHER INCREASED, THE LEVEL OF PATRONAGE WILL SURELY BE REDUCED FURTHER,+ HE SAID.

+THIS MEANS MORE EMPTY TAXIS WILL CRUISE AROUND TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN AT PRESENT. THIS MUST IN TURN CAUSE EVEN GREATER CONGESTION, LEADING TO MORE TIME BEING LOST IN CONVEYING PEOPLE AND GOODS, WITH ALL THAT ENTAILS FOR THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR ECONOMY,+ HE ADDED.

HAVING ANALYSED THE STRUCTURE OF THE TAXI TRADE IN HONG KONG, MR CHEONG POINTED OUT THAT IN ANY INCREASE OF OPERATING COSTS, IT WAS THE TAXI DRIVER ALONE WHO SUSTAINED A REDUCTION IN REAL INCOME AND WHO SUFFERED MOST.

+IT SEEMS TO BE THAT THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY DRIVERS, WHO REPRESENT NUMERICAL MAJORITY IN THE TRADE, IS NOT READILY UNDERSTOOD BY THE ADMINISTRATION. THIS IS ONE FACET OF THE TRADE THAT I BELIEVE THE REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS NOT EXAMINED ADEQUATELY.

+GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE CONDITIONS AND THE DIFFICULTIES UNDER WHICH TAXI DRIVERS EARN THEIR LIVING, AND HAVING REGARD TO THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO ORGANISATION THAT REPRESENTS THEIR INTERESTS, THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER WAYS AND MEANS BY WHICH THE VIEWS OF TAXI DRIVERS COULD BE TAPPED AND BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THOSE WHO FORMULATE TRANSPORT POLICY.

+THIS IS A COMMUNICATION GAP WHICH I AM CONVINCED MUST BE CLOSED - BEFORE THIS PACKAGE CAN BE BROUGHT INTO BALANCE,+ HE SAID.

FORMULATION OF TRANSPORT POLICY WAS NOT AN EASY TASK AND REQUIRED VERY CAREFUL BALANCING AMONG VARIOUS CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF THE COMMUNITY, HE SAID.

MANY A TIME, PAINFUL DECISIONS HAD TO BE MADE WHICH SEEMED UNREASONABLE TO ONE PARTICULAR SECTOR OF THE COMMUNITY, WHEN IN FACT THOSE DECISIONS WERE MADE IN THE INTEREST OF THE COMMON GOOD, HE SAID.

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### RECONSIDERATION OF POLICY URGED

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THE HON CHEUNG YAN-LUNG URGED THE AUTHORITIES +TO RECONSIDER THE TAXI POLICY IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS.+

+HISTORY HAS A WAY OF REPEATING ITSELF, SO I CALL HERE AND NOW FOR A VERY CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS TAKEN BEFORE FORMULATING THIS POLICY AND THE PUBLIC RELATIONS MEASURES TAKEN IN THE EVENT LEADING UP TO THE TAXI STRIKE,+ HE SAID.

+THERE IS A LESSON TO BE LEARNED HERE AND WE SHOULD PREVENT SIMILAR INCIDENTS FROM OCCURRING IN FUTURE.+

+IN A STRIKE, THERE ARE NO WINNERS BUT ONLY LOSERS, THE DRIVERS LOSING THEIR WAGES, THE OPERATORS LOSING THEIR EARNINGS, AND THE PUBLIC BEING INCONVENIENCED BY LOSING ITS MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION AND THE GOVERNMENT LOSING ITS CREDIBILITY.+

TAXIS HAD AN IMPORTANT JOB OF KEEPING HONG KONG MOVING, AND HE DISAGREED WITH THE POLICY OF TREATING TAXIS AS PERSONALISED TRANSPORT, HE SAID.

THEY WERE NOT FOR PERSONAL PLEASURE, HE SAID.

+THEREFORE THE ARGUMENT TO INCREASE THE FIRST REGISTRATION TAX AND LICENCE FEES FOR TAXIS BECAUSE THEY ARE PERSONALISED TRANSPORT DOES NOT HOLD, AND THE POLICY SHOULD BE GIVEN FURTHER CONSIDERATION,+ HE SAID.

HE PROPOSED THAT THE BILLS BE DEFERRED +UNTIL AFTER THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY ASSESSED.+

MR CHEUNG STRESSED THAT HIS OPPOSITION TO THE BILLS WAS NOT DUE TO PRESSURE OR INTIMIDATION.

+I CONDEMN THE STRIKE ACTION TAKEN BY THE TAXI TRADE, NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT SHOWED COMPLETE DISREGARD FOR THE PUBLIC, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT INDIRECTLY PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY WHICH BAD ELEMENTS EXPLOITED,+ HE ADDED.

+THE RECENT EVENTS WERE WIDELY REPORTED ALL OVER THE WORLD AND IN SUCH A SENSITIVE TIME, THIS SORT OF PUBLICITY CAN ONLY DO HONG KONG HARM,+ HE STRESSED.

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+EXCESSIVE CONTROL+ OVER TAXIS CLAIMED  
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THE HON MRS SELINA CHOW CRITICISED THE ADMINISTRATION FOR ITS +EXCESSIVE CONTROL OVER THE VIABILITY OF THE TAXI TRADE+.

+ON THE ONE HAND IT SEEKS TO CONTROL SUPPLY AND DEMAND, AS WELL AS POTENTIAL REVENUE TO THE TRADE, BY REGULATING THE NUMBER OF LICENCES ISSUED AND THE FARES CHARGED,+ SHE SAID.

+ON THE OTHER IT DETERMINES A SUBSTANTIAL PROPORTION OF THE OPERATING COSTS OF THE TRADE THROUGH TENDERING, REGISTRATION TAX, ANNUAL LICENCE FEE AND SURCHARGE ON DIESEL ENGINES, LEAVING LITTLE ROOM FOR OPERATORS TO MANOEUVRE.+

MRS CHOW SAID THIS WAS +CERTAINLY AN EXCEPTION TO THE OVERALL SPIRIT OF FREE ENTERPRISE ON WHICH MUCH OF HONG KONG'S SUCCESS IS BASED.

EARLIER IN HER SPEECH IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, MRS CHOW SAID THAT SHE OPPOSED THE BILLS BECAUSE THE TIMING WAS WRONG. +WHATEVER CONSULTATION HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN HAD OBVIOUSLY NOT BEEN ADEQUATE AND THOROUGH ENOUGH TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE VIEWS OF THE TAXI TRADE AND SHE DID NOT AGREE WITH THE LOGIC ON WHICH THE PROPOSED BILLS WERE BASED,+ SHE SAID.

+AS THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT STATED QUITE CLEARLY, THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE MUST BE TO KEEP HONG KONG MOVING.

+HOWEVER, APART FROM THE MORATORIUM ON URBAN TAXIS, I FAIL TO SEE HOW ANY OF THE OTHER PROPOSALS IN THE PACKAGE WOULD HELP TO KEEP HONG KONG MOVING ANY MORE SMOOTHLY THAN IT HAS DONE,+ SHE SAID.

+IN FACT THE INCREASE IN TAXI FARE MIGHT LEAD TO A DROP IN DEMAND, RESULTING NOT SO MUCH IN ADDITIONAL TAXI MOVEMENT, FOR WHETHER VACANT OR OCCUPIED THEY WOULD REMAIN ON THE ROAD ANYWAY, BUT IN MORE EMPTY TAXIS CRUISING, THEREBY PUSHING UP THE DISTANCE PRESENTLY COVERED BY VACANT TAXIS.

+IF THE PURPOSE IS TO UPGRADE THE EFFICIENCY OF TAXI TRANSPORT, THEN SURELY ANY MEASURES INTRODUCED SHOULD BE AIMED AT CUTTING DOWN THE CRUISING TIME OF VACANT TAXIS,+ SHE SAID.

SHE FELT THAT TO DENY TAXIS PUBLIC TRANSPORT STATUS COULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE NUMBER OF PASSENGERS THEY CARRIED EACH DAY (1.03 MILLION) HAD BEEN SHOWN IN A SEPTEMBER 1983 REVIEW TO BE ALMOST AS MANY AS THE MTR (1.17M), SHE SAID.

SHE MAINTAINED THAT TAXIS WERE +A MODE OF TRANSPORT WIDELY USED BY A FAIRLY MAJOR PORTION OF OUR TRAVELLING PUBLIC+.

ON THE SURCHARGE ON DIESEL ENGINES, SHE RECALLED THAT THIS WAS INTRODUCED IN MAY 1982 BECAUSE THERE WAS GOING TO BE AN INDIRECT TAX ON PETROL AND NONE ON DIESEL FUEL.

+LAST YEAR THE INDIRECT TAX ON DIESEL WAS INTRODUCED, BUT THE SURCHARGE REMAINED.

+THIS ALREADY REPRESENTS A DOUBLE TAX ON DIESEL ENGINES. THE FACT THAT TWICE THE AMOUNT IS NOW PROPOSED FOR TAXIS SEEMS DOUBLY UNFAIR,+ SHE NOTED.

HAVE FAITH IN UMELCO, PEOPLE URGED  
\* \* \* \* \*

IF THE PEOPLE OF HONG KONG HAVE FAITH IN UMELCO, THEY MUST ALLOW ITS MEMBERS TO DO THEIR JOB IN GOOD TIME, DR THE HON HENRIETTA IP, SAID TODAY.

SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION TO THE TWO BILLS IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, SHE ADDED: +IF WE WANT HONG KONG TO ENJOY PROSPERITY AND STABILITY, WE MUST PLAY OUR PART AS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS.+

DR IP SAID SHE OPPOSED BOTH BILLS WITHOUT AMENDMENTS FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

FIRSTLY, ONE BILL IMPOSES AN UNFAIR INCREASE IN THE FIRST REGISTRATION TAX FOR THOSE 873 TAXIS TENDERED UNDER THE PREVIOUS TAX SCHEDULE WHICH HAVE YET TO BE REGISTERED,

SECONDLY, THE INCREASE IN THE ANNUAL LICENCE FEE FOR TAXIS IS +TOO HIGH, TOO SUDDEN AND WRONGLY TIMED+, AND

LASTLY, MANY POINTS IN THE BILLS NEEDED TO BE QUESTIONED.

SUGGESTING ALTERNATIVE WAYS FOR REVENUE PROTECTION, SHE SAID ONE WAY MIGHT BE BY SPECIFYING THE RETROACTIVE DATE AS THE DATE OF THE FIRST READING OF A BILL.

TWO OTHER BILLS HAD RECENTLY BEEN DEEMED TO BE EFFECTIVE ON A DATE PRECEDING THE FINAL READING, SHE RECALLED.

THE SUBSEQUENT COLLECTION OF HIGHER CHARGES WAS A TECHNICAL PROBLEM WHICH A RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT COULD MANAGE, SHE SAID.

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PROPOSED INCREASES FELT 'TOO HIGH'  
\* \* \*

THE RATES OF INCREASES PROPOSED IN THE PACKAGE WERE TOO HIGH FOR THE CURRENT TAXI TRADE, AND INADEQUATE CONSIDERATION HAD BEEN GIVEN TO THE HARDSHIP ON INDIVIDUAL TAXI OWNERS, DRIVERS AND THOSE TENDERERS WHO HAD NOT YET PURCHASED THEIR TAXIS, THE HON CHAN YING-LUN SAID.

+THE BILLS ARE PARTICULARLY UNFAIR TO ALL OF THE 873 SUCCESSFUL TENDERERS FROM THE PREVIOUS TENDER EXERCISE BECAUSE THEY HAD NOT ANTICIPATED THE ADDITIONAL COST OF \$32 200 FOR PURCHASING A NEW TAXI WHEN THEY SUBMITTED THEIR TENDERS,+ HE SAID.

AS FOR THE ARGUMENT OF THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT THAT TAXIS SHOULD BE TREATED LIKE PRIVATE CARS AND NOT PUBLIC TRANSPORT, MR CHAN FOUND THIS DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT AS STATISTICS SHOWED THAT IN SEPTEMBER 1983 TAXIS CARRIED ALMOST AS MANY PASSENGERS AS THE MTR.

HE HOPED THAT THE TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT WOULD TAKE A DEEPER LOOK INTO THE TAXI TRADE AND SOUND OUT THOSE WHO WOULD BE AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSALS BEFORE COMING UP WITH A MORE ACCEPTABLE POLICY NEXT TIME.

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LEGCO MUST ENSURE FAIRNESS OF BILLS

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THE HON MRS RITA FAN SAID THAT THE INCREASES PROPOSED IN THE TWO BILLS SHOULD BE SUBJECTED TO FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

WHILE SUPPORTING THE OBSERVATION OF THE HON STEPHEN CHEONG ON THE DIFFICULTY OF A FOOL-PROOF TRANSPORT POLICY, SHE SAID, +HOWEVER, IT IS THE DUTY OF THIS COUNCIL TO ENSURE THAT BILLS PASSED ARE FAIR AND EQUITABLE, AND IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE.+

SHE NOTED THAT THE TAXI TRADE, ESPECIALLY THE TAXI DRIVERS, HAD SEEN THE BILLS AS A DIRECT THREAT TO THEIR LIVELIHOOD.

+THE PROPOSED INCREASE IN FIRST REGISTRATION TAX, ANNUAL LICENCE FEES AND DIESEL ENGINE SURCHARGE ARE INDEED STEEP, AND THE SYMPATHY OF THE COMMUNITY IS LARGELY TOWARDS THE TAXI TRADE ON THIS OCCASION.

+WHILE THE FIGURES QUOTED BY THE SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT LENT SOME GROUNDS OF SUPPORT TO THE PROPOSED PACKAGE OF MEASURES, THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER SUCH A LEVEL OF INCREASES, IMPLEMENTED AT ONE STROKE, IS INDEED TOO HEAVY A BURDEN FOR THE TAXI TRADE,+ SHE SAID.

MRS FAN ALSO QUERIED THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE TIMING OF THE PROPOSED INCREASES.

SHE POINTED OUT THAT THE BILLS WERE INTRODUCED INTO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LAST WEDNESDAY AND WOULD HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE FROM THAT DATE IF APPROVED.

+THIS MEANS THAT A NUMBER OF TAXI OWNERS WOULD HAVE TO PAY THE PROPOSED ANNUAL LICENCE FEE AND DIESEL ENGINE SURCHARGE AT THE END OF THE LUNAR YEAR.

+AROUND THIS PERIOD, THE MAJORITY, IF NOT ALL, OF CHINESE FAMILIES INCUR ADDITIONAL EXPENDITURE IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL CUSTOM.

+ANY LARGE AMOUNT OF CASH OUTLAY WHICH IS NOT BUDGETED FOR DURING THE YEAR CAN CAUSE FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY,+ SHE SAID.

+THERE IS, THEREFORE, GRAVE DOUBT IN MY MIND AS TO THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE TIMING OF THE PROPOSED INCREASES.+

SHE EXPRESSED REGRET THAT THE TAXI TRADE HAD REACTED WITH A STRIKE.

+WHILE THEIR SENTIMENTS AND GRIEVANCES ARE UNDERSTANDABLE, AND HAVE MY SYMPATHY, I NEVERTHELESS REGRET THAT THEY HAVE CHOSEN SUCH A DRASTIC METHOD TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS.

+I BELIEVE THERE ARE MORE APPROPRIATE AND FAR MORE RATIONAL METHODS THAT CAN BE ADOPTED TO ACHIEVE THE SAME AIM.WITHOUT DISTURBING OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY,+ SHE STRESSED.

+THE TAXI SERVICE FULFILS A COMMUNITY NEED, BUT IF TAXIS ARE PERCEIVED AS INSTRUMENTS FOR BLOCKING TRAFFIC, PUBLIC SUPPORT AND SYMPATHY IS BOUND TO DETERIORATE VERY QUICKLY,+ SHE WARNED.

ROLE OF TAXIS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT STRESSED

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THE HON MRS PAULINE NG SAID THAT SHE COULD NOT AGREE WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT TAXIS WERE A FORM OF PERSONALISED TRANSPORT AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS PRIVATE CARS AND NOT AS A MEANS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT.

SHE POINTED OUT THAT THE RESULTS OF A SURVEY PROVED THAT TAXIS HAD BECOME A DAILY MEANS OF TRANSPORT FOR PEOPLE.

+WE TAKE TAXIS WHENEVER WE WANT TO GO TO PLACES NOT SERVED BY BUS AND MINIBUS.

+IF WE WANT TO SEND AN AILING FAMILY MEMBER TO THE HOSPITAL OR ARE IN A HURRY TO ATTEND URGENT MATTERS, OR WHEN WE ARE GOING OUT WITH OLD PEOPLE OR YOUNG CHILDREN WHICH MAKES BOARDING A CROWDED BUS DIFFICULT, TAXIS BECOME THE NECESSARY MEANS OF TRANSPORT,+ SHE SAID.

SHE SAID SHE DOUBTED WHETHER THE DISTRICT BOARDS AND TAXI OPERATORS' UNIONS HAD BEEN CONSULTED.

IF THEY HAD BEEN CONSULTED, THE TAXI STRIKE WOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED, SHE SAID.

SHE FELT THAT THIS REFLECTED A NEED FOR A REVIEW OF +THE PROCESS AND DEPTH OF CONSULTATIONS+.

SHE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD IN FUTURE SOUND OUT PUBLIC OPINION SUFFICIENTLY, TO AVOID COMMITTING THE SAME MISTAKE.

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HARDSHIP ON TAXI OPERATORS STRESSED

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A MORE IN-DEPTH STUDY OF THE FINANCIAL ASPECT OF TAXI OPERATORS AND MORE DETAILED INFORMATION FROM THOSE IN THE BUSINESS WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR PROBLEMS, THE HON PETER POON SAID.

NOTING THAT THE TAXI TRADE WAS COMPLEX AND FRAGMENTED, HE SAID THE STATISTICS AND EVIDENCE COLLECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT NOT BE TOTALLY CORRECT.

MR POON SAID THAT THE REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED BY UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS STRESSED THAT OF THE PROPOSED 17 PER CENT INCREASE IN THE TAXI FARE, 7.5 PER CENT WOULD NOT COVER THE ADDITIONAL LEVIES WHICH THE BILLS SOUGHT TO IMPOSE.

+IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT ONE OF THE MAIN CONSIDERATIONS OF IMPOSING A NEW TAX IS AFFORDABILITY,+ HE SAID.

/+FROM THE .....

+FROM THE INFORMATION SUPPLIED TO US, IT IS EVIDENT THAT MANY TAXI OPERATORS ARE EITHER MAKING SMALL LOSSES OR JUST BREAKING EVEN AND SEVERAL TAXI FIRMS HAVE GONE OUT OF BUSINESS. THEIR PROFIT AS WELL AS TAXI DRIVERS' INCOME HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASED,+ HE SAID.

THERE WOULD THUS BE GENUINE HARDSHIP IF THE PROPOSED SHARP AND SUDDEN INCREASES WERE TO BE INTRODUCED AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER JUSTIFIED AS A TRANSPORT OBJECTIVE, MR POON STRESSED.

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**BADLY HANDLED INCIDENT COULD PRECIPITATE CRISIS**  
**\*\*\*\*\***

AN INCIDENT, IF BADLY HANDLED, MIGHT LEAD TO A SOCIAL CRISIS AND GIVE PEOPLE AN UNEASY FEELING, THE HON YEUNG PO-KWAN SAID IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL TODAY.

THE RECENT STRIKES OF THE TAXI MEN AND THE STREET DISTURBANCES WERE CITED BY MR YEUNG AS EXAMPLES FROM WHICH THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT DRAW LESSONS.

MR YEUNG CONCURRED WITH THE GROUNDS OF OBJECTION RAISED BY OTHER UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS TO THE TWO BILLS.

HE THEN RAISED THE FOLLOWING POINTS FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S CONSIDERATION:

- \* THE GOVERNMENT PUBLISHED THE 'PROTECTION OF REVENUE ORDER' IN AN EXTRA ISSUE OF THE GAZETTE TO INCREASE FEES OF TAXIS, WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT. THE TERM +IMMEDIATE EFFECT+ WAS ENOUGH TO PROVOKE ANXIETY AND RESENTMENT FROM THE PEOPLE.
- \* BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSED ANYTHING, IT SHOULD CAREFULLY AND REPEATEDLY CONSIDER WHETHER THE PROPOSAL WAS ENDOWED WITH REASONS ACCEPTABLE TO THE PUBLIC, IN PARTICULAR IF THE PROPOSAL WOULD AFFECT THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF THE PEOPLE CONCERNED.
- \* GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS SHOULD REVIEW THE REASONS FOR JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND TAKE APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO COUNTER THEM. IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD THAT ONLY TRUE DATA PLUS CORRECT ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT COULD HELP AVOID REPETITION OF SIMILAR INCIDENTS.

HE ALSO SAID THE POLICE DESERVED TO BE PRAISED FOR THEIR APPROPRIATE ACTION IN HANDLING THE STRIKES AND FOR THEIR STRONG AND EFFECTIVE METHODS IN DEALING WITH THE DISTURBANCES.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 1984

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GOVERNOR RETURNING TOMORROW

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THE GOVERNOR, SIR EDWARD YOUDE AND LADY YOUDE WILL BE RETURNING TO HONG KONG TOMORROW (THURSDAY) WITH UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

THEY WILL LEAVE LONDON ON FLIGHT BR 382, AND THEIR ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL IN HONG KONG IS 6.20 PM.

UNOFFICIAL MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WHO WILL ACCOMPANY SIR EDWARD ON HIS RETURN TRIP WILL INCLUDE SIR S.Y. CHUNG, MR ROGER LOBO, MR MICHAEL SANDBERG, MR T.S. LO, MISS LYDIA DUNN AND MISS MARIA TAM.

A PRESS FACILITY HAS BEEN ARRANGED FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS AND CAMERAMEN TO COVER THE GROUP'S ARRIVAL. THEY SHOULD ASSEMBLE IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE ROOM ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF THE AIRPORT TERMINAL NOT LATER THAN 5.20 PM TOMORROW.

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NEW BANK OF CHINA SITE GRANT SIGNED

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THE CONDITIONS OF GRANT FOR THE SITE IN CENTRAL ON WHICH THE NEW BANK OF CHINA BUILDING WILL BE CONSTRUCTED WERE SIGNED TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

MR CHEN HUNG, SENIOR DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER, SIGNED FOR THE BANK OF CHINA, WHILE THE DIRECTOR OF LANDS, MR JOHN TODD, SIGNED FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

THE BANK OF CHINA AGREED TO BUY THE SITE, BOUNDED BY GARDEN ROAD, QUEENSWAY AND COTTON TREE DRIVE, IN AUGUST, 1982, FOR A PREMIUM OF \$1 000 MILLION. UNDER THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT, THE BANK HAS MADE THE INITIAL DOWN PAYMENT OF \$60 MILLION AND THE BALANCE WILL BE PAID IN 13 EQUAL ANNUAL INSTALMENTS.

MR CHEN SAID IT WAS HIS GREAT PLEASURE TO CONCLUDE ON BEHALF OF THE BANK OF CHINA A TREATY GRANT WITH THE LANDS DEPARTMENT OF THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT IN RESPECT OF THE NEW BANK BUILDING SITE.

+IN VIEW OF THE EXPANDING HONG KONG ECONOMY, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO ITS EXPECTED PROSPERITY, THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS BANK HAD LONG CONTEMPLATED - AND WENT INTO NEGOTIATION IN LATE 1981 WITH THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT - THE PURCHASE OF A GOOD SIZE SITE IN CENTRAL ON WHICH TO ERECT A NEW BUILDING TO COPE WITH THE FUTURE NEEDS OF THIS BANK.

+TO DO THE DESIGNING, MR I.M. PEI, THE WORLD FAMOUS UNITED STATES ARCHITECT OF CHINESE DESCENT, HAS BEEN ENGAGED. BESIDES THE BUILDING ITSELF, MR PEI HAS ALSO DEVOTED GREAT EFFORT IN DESIGNING A CIRCULATING TRAFFIC SYSTEM AND SURFACE LANDSCAPING.

/+I WOULD .....

+I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS ON BEHALF OF THE BANK OF CHINA OUR APPRECIATION TO THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS OF THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT FOR THEIR CLOSE CO-OPERATION AND KIND ASSISTANCE DURING THE COURSE OF NEGOTIATION AND OUR THANKS TO ALL ARCHITECTS, ENGINEERS, CONSULTANTS AND TRAFFIC EXPERTS IN NEW YORK AND HONG KONG, WHO PARTICIPATED IN BRINGING ABOUT THE PRESENT RESULTS OF THE PROJECT,+ MR CHEN SAID.

MR TODD SAID HE WAS VERY PLEASED TO CLEAR THIS IMPORTANT STEP IN THE BANK OF CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME. DETAILED DRAWING UP OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS WITHIN THE BASIC CONSTRAINTS OF THE SITE WHICH WERE REFLECTED IN THE CONDITIONS OF GRANT COULD NOW PROCEED.

+THE SITE IS NOT AN EASY ONE TO DEVELOP,+ MR TODD SAID, +BECAUSE OF THE SURROUNDING ELEVATED PUBLIC ROADS.+ THE GOVERNMENT HAD RESPONDED FLEXIBLY TO AN IMAGINATIVE APPROACH BY THE BANK TO AMEND THE ALIGNMENT AND IMPROVE THE ROAD LINKING GARDEN ROAD AND COTTON TREE DRIVE. THIS WOULD UPGRADE ACCESS TO THE BUILDING AND BETTER REFLECT THE QUALITY OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED, HE SAID.

A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN SAID SITE INVESTIGATIONS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT AND WORK ON THE BUILDING - A HIGH-RISE OFFICE TOWER ERECTED ON A PODIUM STRUCTURE CONTAINING THE MAIN BANKING HALLS WITH VEHICLE PARKING BENEATH - IS EXPECTED TO COMMENCE LATER THIS YEAR.

THE MAXIMUM GROSS FLOOR AREA OF THE BUILDING PERMITTED UNDER THE GRANT CONDITIONS WAS JUST OVER 100 000 SQUARE METRES.

A PORTION OF THE SITE FRONTING GARDEN ROAD, RESERVED FOR PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, WOULD BE DESIGNED AND LANDSCAPED AS PART OF THE PROJECT AND ON COMPLETION WOULD BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

THE SPOKESMAN SAID THE UPGRADED ACCESS TO THE NEW BUILDING WOULD ALSO IMPROVE ACCESS POTENTIAL FOR THE OTHER CROWN LAND SITE IMMEDIATELY TO THE SOUTH. THIS WOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR SALE ON REMOVAL OF THE TEMPORARY FIRE STATION NOW ON THE SITE.

#### FIVE CROWN LAND SITES SOLD AT AUCTION

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FIVE PIECES OF CROWN LAND WERE SOLD FOR MORE THAN \$94 MILLION AT AN AUCTION AT THE FURAMA HOTEL TODAY (WEDNESDAY).

ONE OF THE SITES, IN LUNG CHEUNG ROAD, WONG TAI SIN, WHICH IS FOR NON-INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND MEASURES 2 616 SQUARE METRES, WAS BOUGHT BY OVERSKIP COMPANY LIMITED FOR \$47.5 MILLION (\$18 157 PER SQUARE METRE). BIDDING OPENED AT \$20 MILLION.

A SITE ON THE KOWLOON BAY RECLAMATION MEASURING 4 115 SQUARE METRES, WHICH IS FOR INDUSTRIAL AND GODOWN DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS FOR CARGO HANDLING AND CONCRETE BATCHING USE, WAS SOLD FOR \$17.8 MILLION (\$4 326 PER SQUARE METRE), BIDDING OPENING AT \$6 MILLION. THE BUYER WAS HONG TAI YUEN LTD.

FROM AN OPENING BID OF \$9 MILLION, A PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL LOT IN TUEN MUN MEASURING 8 196 SQUARE METRES WAS EVENTUALLY BOUGHT FOR \$14.5 MILLION (\$1 769 PER SQUARE METRE). THE PURCHASER WAS STARLITE LAND DEVELOPMENT CO. PTE. LTD.

A SIMILAR LOT IN SHA TIN MEASURING 2 900 SQUARE METRES WAS BOUGHT BY UBC (HONG KONG) LIMITED FOR \$1.5 MILLION (\$517 PER SQUARE METRE), \$0.2 MILLION OVER THE OPENING BID.

THE LAST SITE, MEASURING 6 400 SQUARE METRES WAS SOLD AT ITS OPENING PRICE OF \$13 MILLION (\$2 031 PER SQUARE METRE). IT IS ALSO IN SHA TIN AND WAS BOUGHT BY DIGITAL EQUIPMENT INTERNATIONAL LTD. FOR INDUSTRIAL AND GODOWN DEVELOPMENT.

THE AUCTIONEER TODAY WAS GOVERNMENT LAND AGENT, MR BOB POPE.

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#### BIG DROP IN BIRTH RATE

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THERE HAS BEEN A BIG DECLINE IN THE BIRTH RATE IN HONG KONG OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, ACCORDING TO A REPORT ON DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN HONG KONG FROM 1971 TO 1982.

AT THE LEVEL PREVAILING BY 1982, THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF BIRTHS PER WOMAN DURING HER REPRODUCTIVE AGE (BETWEEN 15 AND 49) WAS LESS THAN TWO, THE REPORT PREPARED BY THE CENSUS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT SHOWS.

+THIS LEVEL OF FERTILITY, IF UNCHANGED, WOULD BE INSUFFICIENT FOR A GENERATION TO REPLACE ITSELF, + THE REPORT INDICATES.

THE ANALYSIS ALSO SHOWS THAT ABOUT 70 PER CENT OF CHILDBEARING IS COMPLETED WITHIN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF MARRIAGE.

UNLIKE THE BIRTH RATE, HOWEVER, THERE WAS AN UPWARD TREND IN THE ANNUAL NUMBER OF MARRIAGES THROUGHOUT THE 1970'S, WITH THE NUMBER IN 1982 BEING ALMOST TWICE THAT OF 1971. THIS GROWTH IS A RESULT OF THE BULGE IN BIRTHS DURING THE 1950'S LEADING TO A BULGE CURRENTLY IN THE NUMBER OF PERSONS IN THE MARRIAGEABLE AGE GROUPS. ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, THE PEAK AGES FOR FIRST MARRIAGE IN THE CASE OF MALES ARE 30 TO 34 AND THOSE FOR FEMALES ARE 25 TO 29, WITH AN AVERAGE AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE OF 28 FOR MEN AND 24 FOR WOMEN.

MORTALITY DECLINED STEADILY OVER THE PERIOD 1971-82. THERE HAS BEEN A CONSIDERABLE FALL IN DEATH RATES DURING INFANCY, CHILDHOOD AND AT THE YOUNG ADULT AGES, BUT THE IMPROVEMENT DECREASES WITH AGE. IN GENERAL, IMPROVEMENT FOR MALES IS GREATER THAN FOR FEMALES. BY 1981 A MALE BABY COULD EXPECT TO LIVE, ON AVERAGE, 72 YEARS AND A FEMALE BABY 78 YEARS. THE CORRESPONDING EXPECTATIONS OF LIFE FOR 1971 WERE 68 AND 76 YEARS RESPECTIVELY.

THE REPORT CONTAINS MANY MORE FINDINGS AND DETAILED TABLES ON VITAL REGISTRATION STATISTICS ON BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS.

THE REPORT IS NOW ON SALE AT \$20 A COPY AT THE GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS CENTRE, GENERAL POST OFFICE BUILDING, HONG KONG.

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GOVERNOR TO INSPECT CSD ANNUAL PARADE  
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THE GOVERNOR, SIR EDWARD YOUDE, WILL INSPECT THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL PARADE ON FRIDAY (JANUARY 20) AFTERNOON AT THE PARADE GROUND OF THE STAFF TRAINING INSTITUTE IN STANLEY.

HE WILL ALSO PRESENT COLONIAL PRISON SERVICE MEDALS TO 32 OFFICERS FOR 18 YEARS' EXEMPLARY SERVICE.

YOU ARE INVITED TO COVER THE EVENT WHICH WILL START AT 4 PM.

PRESS TRANSPORT WILL LEAVE THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS AT GUARDIAN HOUSE, 32 01 KWAN ROAD, WAN CHAI, AT 3 PM SHARP.

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TSUEN KING CIRCUIT PLAYGROUND OPENED  
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THE OPENING OF TSUEN KING CIRCUIT PLAYGROUND MARKED THE COMPLETION OF ANOTHER BADLY-NEEDED RECREATION FACILITY FOR THE LARGE TSUEN WAN TOWNSHIP IN THE NEW TERRITORIES, THE DIRECTOR OF NEW TERRITORIES SERVICES, MR JOHN HEYWOOD SAID TODAY.

SPEAKING AT THE OPENING, MR HEYWOOD SAID THE 1.25-HECTARE PLAYGROUND CONTAINED FOUR TENNIS COURTS, A CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND WITH BOATING POOL AND REST GARDEN.

+THUS IT CATERS FOR ALL AGES AND BOTH ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATION,+ HE SAID.

THE PROJECT COST MORE THAN \$5 MILLION, OF WHICH \$1 MILLION WAS DONATED BY THE SUN HUNG KAI PROPERTIES GROUP, HE SAID.

HE THANKED THE COMPANY'S DIRECTOR FOR THE DONATION AND SAID TSUEN WAN RESIDENTS WOULD DERIVE THE RECREATIONAL BENEFIT FROM IT.

+AS ALWAYS, IT IS OUR PLEASURE AND OUR PRIVILEGE IN THE NEW TERRITORIES SERVICES DEPARTMENT TO MANAGE LOCAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES SUCH AS THIS FOR THE BETTER ENJOYMENT OF LOCAL RESIDENTS,+ HE SAID.

HE EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE YOUNGER PEOPLE WOULD ENJOY THE PLAYGROUND, AND THE MORE ATHLETIC MEMBERS WOULD ENJOY THE TENNIS COURTS, AND THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY THE ELDER, WOULD ENJOY THE REST GARDEN.

JOINING MR HEYWOOD AT THE RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY WERE THE DIRECTOR AND DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER OF SUN HUNG KAI PROPERTIES GROUP, MR WALTER KWOK; THE CHAIRMAN OF RECREATION AND SPORTS COMMITTEE OF TSUEN WAN DISTRICT BOARD, MR CHAU HOW-CHEN; AND THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER OF TSUEN WAN, MR A.H. HSU.

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DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IS EVOLUTIONARY  
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THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION SCHEME IN HONG KONG IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY AND WILL DEVELOP TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS AND CHANGING ENVIRONMENT, SAID MR WILFRED WONG, DISTRICT OFFICER OF YAU MA TEI AND MONG KOK.

+WE MUST TAKE HEED NOT TO DEPRIVE IT OF NORMAL GROWTH. LIKE WINE, IT SHOULD BE GIVEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO MATURE AND MELLOW.+

IN A LUNCHEON SPEECH TO THE ROTARY CLUB OF KOWLOON WEST, HE SAID NO SYSTEM, POLITICAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE, COULD BE ESTABLISHED OVERNIGHT AND NO SYSTEM WHICH IS IN THE PROCESS OF EVOLUTION COULD BE BRANDED AS PERFECT.

+GOVERNMENT IS WELL AWARE OF THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM CONTINUES TO EVOLVE TO MEET THE CHANGING NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

+IN THIS RESPECT, THE SECRETARY FOR DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IS NOW REVIEWING THE EXISTING SYSTEM TO SEE HOW IT CAN BE FURTHER IMPROVED.+

ALTHOUGH THE DISTRICT BOARDS DO NOT HAVE ANY EXECUTIVE FUNCTION, MR WONG SAID THEY HAD BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL IN HIGHLIGHTING DISTRICT PROBLEMS AND INFLUENCING THE WAY THESE PROBLEMS WERE TO BE DEALT WITH.

THE EXISTENCE OF DISTRICT BOARDS HAD ALSO BROUGHT ABOUT MORE SPEEDY RESPONSE FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS CONCERNED.

+THE CONCEPT OF ENCOURAGING GREATER LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS HAS BEEN WELL RECEIVED BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND THE DISTRICT BOARDS HAVE BEEN LOOKED UPON AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE.

+THE 492 MEMBERS, THE MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE UNOFFICIALS, HAVE ALL WORKED HARD TO UNDERSTAND AND SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR OWN DISTRICTS,+ HE SAID.

HE POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS PRESSURE AND ANXIETY FOR ACHIEVEMENTS FROM AMONG THE BOARD MEMBERS AND MORE SO FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.

+ALSO, MANY DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS OFTEN FEEL THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE POWER OR AUTHORITY TO EFFECT THE NECESSARY CHANGES TO MEET THE DEMAND AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE LOCAL PEOPLE.

+AS A RESPONSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE GOVERNMENT, WE WELCOME SUCH EXPRESSIONS BUT AT THE SAME TIME SHOULD TRY TO ASSESS THEIR VALIDITY,+ HE SAID.

THE GOVERNMENT HOPED TO IMPROVE ITS PERFORMANCE AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES AND DISTRICT BOARDS IN EACH OF THE 18 ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS.

REFERRING TO FREQUENT COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION SCHEME AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MACHINERIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES, MR WONG SAID THERE WAS AN INHERENT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.

FOR EXAMPLE, LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM ARE NORMALLY IN CHARGE OF LOCAL TOWN PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF ROADS, PROVISION OF LOCAL HOUSING, WELFARE, EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND AMENITY SERVICES.

+DICTATED BY THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONFINES OF THE TERRITORY AND THE HIGH MOBILITY OF THE POPULATION, HONG KONG HAS A CENTRALISED FORM OF GOVERNMENT AND THE CIVIL SERVICE OPERATES MOST OF THE SERVICES WHICH IN OTHER COUNTRIES WOULD BE ADMINISTERED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES,+ HE SAID.

+THE CIVIL SERVICE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SUCH SERVICES AS HOSPITALS, PUBLIC WORKS AND UTILITIES, URBAN CLEANSING AND PUBLIC HEALTH, AND THE POLICE FORCE.

+TO LAUNCH DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION ALONG THE LINE OF THE UK MODEL WOULD ONLY BE UNECONOMICAL AND COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

+THEREFORE, INSTEAD OF SEEKING TO DE-CENTRALISE ALL THE GOVERNMENT SERVICES, ONE SHOULD PERHAPS LOOK INTO AREAS WHERE DISTRICT BOARD ADVICE CAN LEAD TO THE PROVISION OF BETTER SERVICES WITHOUT REQUIRING ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.

+A POSSIBLE AREA FOR INVESTIGATION WOULD BE THE MANAGEMENT OF IDENTIFIABLE DISTRICT COMMUNITY FACILITIES,+ HE SAID.

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#### AVIATION CHIEF ATTENDS TALKS

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MR TREVOR THORPE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CIVIL AVIATION, LEFT FOR MANILA TODAY (WEDNESDAY) TO REPRESENT HONG KONG AT AIR SERVICES TALKS BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENTS.

WHILE THERE, MR THORPE WILL ALSO HOLD DISCUSSIONS ON MATTERS OF MUTUAL AVIATION INTEREST WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE BOARD OF AIR TRANSPORTATION OF THE PHILIPPINES.

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PUBLIC URGED TO REGISTER AS VOTERS  
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STUDENTS WERE URGED TODAY TO SUPPORT THE DISTRICT BOARDS BY ENCOURAGING THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS TO REGISTER AS VOTERS DURING THE REGISTRATION EXERCISE IN AUGUST.

THE CALL WAS MADE BY THE YUEN LONG DISTRICT OFFICER, MR JAMES WILSON, AT THE SPEECH DAY OF THE HEUNG YEE KUK YUEN LONG DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL.

HE CALLED UPON THE GRADUATES TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS AND HELP MAKE THE DISTRICT MORE PROSPEROUS.

MR WILSON SAID KNOWLEDGE OBTAINED FROM TEXTBOOKS WAS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR STUDENTS TO COPE WITH ALL THE HAPPENINGS IN SOCIETY, AND HE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATION AND EXPERIENCE.

TO THIS END, HE ENCOURAGED STUDENTS TO TAKE PART IN MORE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND VOLUNTARY SERVICES.

HE ALSO PAID TRIBUTE TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION.

SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION WAS ADVANCING RAPIDLY IN YUEN LONG, HE SAID.

TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH MODERN FACILITIES WILL BE ESTABLISHED IN KAI TEI BY SEPTEMBER AND ANOTHER TWO, AT THE LONG PING ESTATE, WILL BE READY IN 1986.

A VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL WILL BE SET UP IN 1985 TO SYNCHRONISE WITH THE FAST DEVELOPING INDUSTRIES AND COMMERCES IN THE DISTRICT.

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POST OFFICE NO. 95 DUE  
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A NEW POST OFFICE WILL BE OPENED ON FRIDAY (JANUARY 20) ON THE GROUND FLOOR SHOP UNIT OF NO. 3, BLOCK D, TOWN CENTRE, GINKGO ROAD, FAIRVIEW PARK, YUEN LONG, NEW TERRITORIES.

IT WILL BE THE 95TH POST OFFICE IN HONG KONG.

TO MARK THE OCCASION, A SHORT OPENING CEREMONY WILL BE HELD AT 11 AM, PERFORMED BY MR MAN PING-NAM, THE FIRST VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE SAN TIN RURAL COMMITTEE AND MR CLIFFORD C.F. WONG, DEVELOPER OF THE FAIRVIEW PARK. ALSO PRESENT WILL BE THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, MR HUGH ARDLEY, AND THE ASSISTANT DISTRICT OFFICER, YUEN LONG, MR T.F. LAM.

IN THE INTEREST OF PHILATELISTS, A SERVICE WILL BE PROVIDED ON THE OCCASION WHEN UNREGISTERED +FIRST DAY+ COVERS PREPARED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, AND BEARING A LOCAL ADDRESS WILL BE ACCEPTED OVER THE COUNTER. THE COVERS WILL BE IMPRESSED WITH THE NORMAL POST OFFICE DATESTAMP AND HANDED BACK TO THE PERSONS PRESENTING THEM.

YOU ARE INVITED TO COVER THE OPENING CEREMONY.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 1984

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CAUSEWAY BAY TRAFFIC CHANGES

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NEW TRAFFIC ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN CAUSEWAY BAY FROM 10 AM ON FRIDAY (JANUARY 20).

THE EASTERN SIDE OF YUN PING ROAD BETWEEN KAI CHIU ROAD AND LAN FONG ROAD WILL BE DESIGNATED AS URBAN CLEARWAY. NO MOTOR VEHICLES OTHER THAN FRANCHISED BUSES WILL BE ALLOWED TO STOP THERE BETWEEN 7 AM AND 7 PM DAILY.

THE CLEARWAY HOURS AT KAI CHIU ROAD BETWEEN HOUSE NO 16 AND JARDINE'S CRESCENT, AND JARDINE'S CRESCENT BETWEEN KAI CHIU ROAD AND JARDINE'S BAZAAR, WILL BE EXTENDED TO 7 AM TO 7 PM DAILY.

HOWEVER, THE EXISTING CLEARWAY RESTRICTION ON YUN PING ROAD BETWEEN HOUSE NO 54 AND KAI CHIU ROAD WILL BE LIFTED.

LAN FONG ROAD WILL BE PROHIBITED TO ALL PUBLIC LIGHT BUSES.

MOREOVER, PAK SHA ROAD WILL BE REROUTED ONE-WAY WESTBOUND. ACCESS TO PAK SHA ROAD WILL BE VIA YUN PING ROAD.

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