



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Governor appoints Commissioner of Inquiry

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The Governor in Council has appointed the Honourable Mr Justice Woo Kwok-hing as the Commissioner of Inquiry to conduct an independent inquiry into the No. 5 alarm fire at Garley Building, Yau Ma Tei on November 20 this year.

A Government spokesman said today (Tuesday) that an independent inquiry chaired by a judge was appropriate and commensurate with the scale of the disaster and the public concern over the incident.

"The establishment of an independent Commission of Inquiry does not reflect a lack of confidence in the professional emergency response by departments, or on the various investigations undertaken by them," he added.

To be set up under the Commissions of Inquiry Ordinance, the terms of reference of the inquiry are:

- * To inquire into the causes of the fire and the circumstances leading to the Garley Building tragedy;
- * To consider the response of the emergency services to the fire, and to advise on the adequacy and the co-ordination of that response; and
- * To make recommendations as to the action needed to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

"The Commissioner will prepare an interim report to the Governor within six months, covering the cause of the fire and the scale of casualties; and to submit a final report within one year," the spokesman said.

"Subject to any advice that the Commissioner may have, both reports are expected to be made public."

End

Senior government appointments announced

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The Government announced today (Tuesday) the appointments of Dr Lam Hung-kwan as Director of the Royal Observatory and Mr Brian Dagnall as Director of Accounting Services.

Dr Lam, currently Assistant Director of the Royal Observatory, will take over from Mr Robert Lau with effect from December 22, 1996. Mr Lau will be retiring after 30 years of service in Government.

Mr Dagnall, currently Deputy Director of Accounting Services, will succeed Mr Alan Richardson with effect from February 3, 1997. Mr Richardson will have served 21 years when he proceeds on pre-retirement leave.

Mr W K Lam, Secretary for the Civil Service, expressed full confidence in both Dr Lam and Mr Dagnall. He also thanked Mr Lau and Mr Richardson for their dedicated and meritorious service in Government.

Following are their biographical notes:

Mr Lau Chi-kwan, Robert, JP

Mr Lau Chi-kwan, Robert joined the civil service as Scientific Officer in August 1966 and was promoted to Senior Scientific Officer in January 1978. He has been Director of the Royal Observatory since May 1995. Mr Lau will proceed on pre-retirement leave on December 22, 1996 at the age of 55.

Dr Lam Hung-kwan, JP

Aged 49, Dr Lam Hung-kwan joined the civil service as Assistant Education Officer in October 1970 and was appointed Scientific Officer in August 1971. He was promoted to Senior Scientific Officer in May 1980 and Assistant Director of the Royal Observatory in July 1990. He has acted as Director on a number of occasions.

Mr Alan Richardson, JP

Aged 54, Mr Richardson joined the Hong Kong Government as a Chief Treasury Accountant in 1976. He was promoted to Assistant Director of Accounting Services in 1981, to Deputy Director of Accounting Services in 1993 and to his present rank of Director of Accounting Services in 1994. On his retirement, Mr Richardson will have completed over 20 years of service with the Hong Kong Government.

Mr Brian Dagnall, JP

Aged 55, Mr Brian Dagnall first joined the Hong Kong Government as Chief Treasury Accountant in October 1981. He was promoted to Assistant Director of Accounting Services in June 1988 and to his present rank of Deputy Director of Accounting Services in April 1994.

End

Tram fare increase approved by ExCo

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The Governor-in-Council today (Tuesday) approved a fare increase for the Hongkong Tramways Limited (HKT) with effect from January 12, 1997.

Under the new fare structure, adult fares will be increased from \$1.20 to \$1.60, child fares from 60 cents to 80 cents, and monthly ticket from \$100 to \$135 accordingly.

A Government spokesman said that tram fares were last increased on February 6, 1994 and the recommended increases were small in absolute terms.

He noted that tram fares were still relatively low compared with those of other modes of public transport.

The spokesman also pointed out that HKT was expected to incur a loss in 1996, and its projected profit for 1997, even after the fare increase, was much lower than its average profit in the past five years.

"A lower rate of increase would not enable HKT to recover its operating costs and would make a higher fare increase in the future inevitable.

"HKT has also drawn up plans to improve tram safety through the upgrading of tram cars, an accelerated track replacement programme, and better training for staff," he added.

End

TAC welcomed way forward for Railway Priority Projects

* * * * *

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) today (Tuesday) welcomed the government's decision to implement the Western Corridor Railway (WCR) in phases and to proceed with the detailed planning and design of the Tseung Kwan O Extension.

Members supported the decision to construct the domestic passenger line of WCR first as there is an urgent need for a rail link to service the rapidly growing population in the North West New Territories.

The domestic passenger line - phase I of the WCR - would comprise of a domestic passenger line running from West Kowloon via Tsuen Wan, Kam Tin, Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai to Tuen Mun.

TAC also noted that provision such as reinforced tracks and higher tunnels etc. would be made during construction of Phase I to accommodate the cross border passenger and freight services at a later date.

As for the Tseung Kwan O Extension, members noted that there was a clear need to extend the MTR to Tseung Kwan O which was forecast to have a population of 250,000 by 2001 and 450,000 by 2011.

Members also welcomed the government's decision to invited MTR to build the Quarry Bay Congestion Relief Works to relieve congestion that had been rapidly building up at Quarry Bay station.

Members also discussed the comments submitted by a TAC working group which met four times since August 1996 to examine in depth the Territorial Development Strategy Review's recommendations relating to transport issues.

After discussion, members agreed that views of the Working Group would be conveyed to the Planning Department as part of its public consultation exercise.

The working group's comments was that town planning in the future should emphasise on vision, flexibility and far-sightedness. Objective of the review should aim at strengthening Hong Kong's competitiveness with other cities in China and the Asia Pacific region by establishing useful linkages with other cities or provinces in China.

Members were also briefed by the Tate's Cairn Tunnel Company on a business and marketing plan which included proposals to increase the company's revenue, including non-toll revenue, reduce expenses, improve services and a long-term strategy for financial management.

End

High air pollution index recorded today

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A high air pollution index (API) of 101 is recorded at Yuen Long today (Tuesday). The APIs for the rest of Hong Kong are below 100, with 96 for the industrial area and 88 for the urban area.

The Principal Environmental Protection Officer of the Environmental Protection Department, Mr Pang Sik-wing, explained that today's poor air quality was due to high nitrogen dioxide levels.

"Air pollutants accumulated because of the persistence of light wind condition over the night and the temperature inversion effect. Subsequently nitrogen dioxide was formed from chemical reactions among the pollutants," he said.

"When the wind becomes stronger later in the day, the air pollution will reduce," he added.

He pointed out that the concentration was higher in Yuen Long because more pollutants had been accumulated in the Deep Bay area due to the stronger inversion effect over the inland.

Mr Pang said that the current air quality condition should have little health effect on normal people.

"When the API exceeds 100, people already suffering from asthma, lung or heart illnesses are advised to reduce physical exertion and laborious outdoor activities," he said.

The API forecast for the territory tomorrow (Wednesday) is 75 for the urban area, 80 for the industrial area and 85 for the new development area.

Members of the public can check the API readings on 2827 8541.

End

Duke of York visits Staffordshire Regiment

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His Royal Highness the Duke of York arrived in Hong Kong last night, for a two day visit to the 1st Battalion the Staffordshire Regiment, in his capacity as their Colonel-in-Chief.

The visit started this (Tuesday) morning, when Prince Andrew took the salute at the Staffords' annual Ferozeshah Parade, in commemoration of their main Regiment Battle Honour. During the parade the Dragon Company, of the Hong Kong Military Service Corps handed to D Company of 1 Staffords the Dragon Banner, to be carried in perpetuity in honour of the Hong Kong Chinese soldiers who served with the British Garrison. In the afternoon Prince Andrew visited C Company, at the Battalion's training camp at High Island.

Prince Andrew will, among other activities, be viewing various aspects of training on Stonecutters Island tomorrow (Wednesday).

End

261 VMs depart on orderly repatriation flights

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Two groups totalling 261 Vietnamese migrants (VMs) returned by air to Hanoi, Vietnam today (Tuesday) on the 87th and 88th flights under the Orderly Repatriation Programme (ORP).

Most of the returnees, comprising 183 men, 41 women, 15 boys and 22 girls, are from North Vietnam. Only three of the returnees are from Central and South Vietnam.

The majority of the returnees arrived in Hong Kong this year, with the remaining in 1988, 1989, 1991 and 1995.

The two groups brought to 8,786 the total number repatriated on ORP flights since November 1991.

End

Monitors' Report submitted to CS

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The monitors appointed to observe the Orderly Repatriation Programme operation this (Tuesday) morning have submitted their report to the Chief Secretary.

The two monitors comprised a non-official Justice of the Peace, Mr So Hing-woh; and representative from a non-government organisation, Mr Liu Ping-cheung from Caritas, Hong Kong.

End

Young drug abusers down 11 per cent in third quarter

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Members of the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) discussed at a meeting today (Tuesday), the drug statistics for the third quarter of 1996 compiled by the Government's Central Registry of Drug Abuse.

The figures indicated that the number of reported drug abusers under 21 decreased by 11.6 per cent to 1,263 in the third quarter of 1996 compared with 1,428 in the corresponding period in 1995.

Among them, 413 were newly reported, representing a decrease of 20.6 per cent from 520 in the same period last year.

The number of reported drug abusers under 21 was 1.47 per thousand of the young population.

ACAN members noted that though drug abuse among young persons has shown a downward trend since the beginning of 1995, the Government will continue to campaign vigorously to beat drugs.

The newly-formed Task Group on Preventive Education Strategy is to review and improve the anti-drug preventive education strategy, in particular the preventive education and publicity programmes targeted at young persons.

For reported drug abusers of all ages, the figure remains stable, with a slight increase of 0.3 per cent to 7,409 compared with 7,385 in the corresponding period in last year. However, the number of newly reported individuals decreased by 3.9 per cent from 1,095 to 1,052.

For female of all ages, the percentage rose from 10.7 per cent (787) to 12.0 per cent (887). For female under 21, an increase of 1.7 percentage points was recorded although the actual figure decreased from 302 to 288.

Compared with the second quarter of 1996, the number of reported individuals and newly reported individuals have decreased by 3.6 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively.

For drug abusers of all ages, the major types of drugs abused were heroin (87.7 per cent), cannabis (6.2 per cent), cough medicines (3.1 per cent) and methylamphetamine or commonly known as 'ice' (2.7 per cent).

For those under 21, major types of drugs abused were heroin (65.5 per cent), cannabis (16.3 per cent), methylamphetamine (9.3 per cent) and cough medicines (8.4 per cent).

On treatment statistics, a total of 4,136 persons were admitted to the three government-funded treatment programmes in the third quarter of 1996.

Of them, 1,037 persons or 25.1 per cent were first-time admissions. These represented an increase in total admissions by 8.4 per cent and an increase in new admissions by 4.9 per cent.

End

Consultancy study on customer services in Post Office

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The Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman, announced today (Tuesday) the award of a consultancy contract on the development of customer services functions in the Hong Kong Post Office to Coopers & Lybrand Consultants Ltd.

"It represents a determined move of the Hong Kong Post Office towards upgrading customer care and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction," said Mr Footman.

The Post office has always prided itself on providing very good customer service. The trading fund will enable us to develop further in this area.

"Although the Post Office has in the past won the best government service awards organised by some of the media, there is no room for complacency," he said.

"As the economy becomes more service-oriented, customers' expectations for superior quality of service increase. As a result, we have to work harder to stay even," he pointed out.

"The Hong Kong Post Office is a successful organisation. We have a dedicated and hard working workforce. I am confident that we, working as a team, will build on this success and continue to provide excellent service to our customers."

The consultancy contract was awarded today at a contract signing ceremony attended by the Postmaster General and the Executive Director of the Coopers & Lybrand Consultants Ltd., Mr Nigel Knight at the conference Room of the General Post Office.

The consultant is required to assist in formulating customer service strategies and plans that would enable Post Office to anticipate and meet the changing customer needs, to establish measures for customer satisfaction and on-going monitors, to review and develop policies and procedures and standards. It is anticipated that the consultancy study would lead to a great number of customer service improvement initiatives.

End

Protection for employees on wage claims improved

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The Protection of Wages on Insolvency (Amendment) Ordinance 1996 which aims to improve protection for employees by allowing them longer time to make applications to the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund has come into effect on December 6, 1996.

A Labour Department spokesman said today (Tuesday) that the Ordinance extended the period for employees to make applications for ex-gratia payments from four months to six months.

"Employees of insolvent employers can now apply to the Fund for ex-gratia payments within six months from the last day of service in respect of arrears of wages, and within six months from the date of termination of employment in respect of wages in lieu of notice and severance payment," the spokesman said.

"Besides, the coverage period for arrears of wages of four months will be counted back from the last day of service instead of from the date of application."

Ex-gratia payments under the Fund covers wages of an employee for services rendered up to \$36,000; wages in lieu of notice up to one month's wages or \$22,500, whichever is the less; and severance payment up to \$36,000, plus 50 per cent of that part of the employee's entitlement to severance payment in excess of \$36,000.

"All employees who are owed wages by their employers are advised to approach the Labour Relations Division of the Labour Department for assistance," the spokesman added.

End

Young inmates acquire certificates with promising results

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Forty-five inmates of Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution were today (Tuesday) presented with their certificates with promising results in various public examinations.

The inmates acquired a total of 74 certificates from the City and Guilds Food and Beverage Service, LCCI Book-keeping and Accounts, Pitman English, Typewriting and Word-processing.

In addition, 65 discharged inmates who obtained 80 certificates, were also presented with their certificates at a ceremony performed by the Chairman of the Prisoners' Education Trust Fund Committee, Mr Paul Young Tze-kong.

End

Comic book on oral health for youth published

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A fun yet educational comic book on oral health will be distributed to all primary and secondary schools and other organisations in the coming weeks to raise public's awareness on the issue.

Jointly published by the Department of Health and the Hong Kong Dental Association, the attractively-designed comic book is targeted at teenagers with an aim to help them establish good oral health habits.

The book, written in Chinese, contains many colourful pictures. It features the adventure of a lovely computer character. Through its experience in real life, messages on the importance of oral health are sent out.

A special feature of the book is the inclusion of the winning entries of the 1993 'Drawing and Comic Strips Competition' organised by the Department of Health, Education Department and Hong Kong Dental Association, which lace together to form the theme of the book.

A total of 10,000 copies of the book have been published and will be sent out to all primary and secondary schools, universities, libraries, youth centres, hospitals, private and government dental clinics and other organisations shortly.

End

74 convicted pollution cases recorded in November

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A total of 74 convictions were recorded in the courts in November for breaching anti-pollution legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Among them, 38 were convictions made under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance (WPCO), 12 under the Noise Control Ordinance (NCO), 13 under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (APCO), 3 under the Ozone Layer Protection Ordinance (OLPO) and 8 under the Waste Disposal Ordinance (WDO).

The fines ranged from \$1,500 to \$160,000. Yucking Limited was fined \$160,000 for discharging polluting matter into the Tolo Harbour and Channel Water Control Zone.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority tender results

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Tender date	:	17 December 1996
Paper on offer	:	EF Bills
Issue number	:	Q651
Issue	:	18 December 1996
Maturity date	:	19 March 1997
Amount applied	:	HK\$5,130 MN
Amount allotted	:	HK\$2,000 MN
Average yield accepted	:	4.62 PCT
Highest yield accepted	:	4.63 PCT
Pro rata ratio	:	About 63 PCT
Average tender yield	:	4.64 PCT
Tender date	:	17 December 1996
Paper on offer	:	EF Bills
Issue number	:	H680
Issue	:	18 December 1996
Maturity date	:	18 June 1997
Amount applied	:	HK\$3,770 MN
Amount allotted	:	HK\$1,000 MN
Average yield accepted	:	4.88 PCT
Highest yield accepted	:	4.89 PCT
Pro rata ratio	:	About 11 PCT
Average tender yield	:	4.90 PCT

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

Tenders to be held in the week beginning - 23 Dec 1996

Tender date : 24 December 1996

Paper on offer : EF Bills

Issue number : Q652

Issue date : 27 December 1996

Maturity date : 26 March 1997

Tenor : 89 Days

Amount on offer : HK\$2,000 MN + 500 MN

Tender date : 24 December 1996

Paper on offer : EF Bills

Issue number : Y697

Issue date : 27 December 1996

Maturity date : 24 December 1997

Tenor : 362 Days

Amount on offer : HK\$500 MN + 150 MN

Tender date : 24 December 1996

Paper on offer : EF Bills

Issue number : Q064

Issue date : 27 December 1996

Maturity date : 22 January 1997

Tenor : 26 Days

Amount on offer : HK\$5,000 MN

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority interbank liquidity

Aggregate balance of settlement time accounts

Opening aggregate balance	1,306 mn	0930 hr	15,855 mn
Closing aggregate balance	604 mn	1000 hr	17,837 mn
Change attributable to :		1100 hr	24,355 mn
Money market activity	-37 mn	1200 hr	28,369 mn
LAF reversal	+9,251 mn	1500 hr	33,107 mn
LAF today	-9,916 mn	1600 hr	32,137 mn

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 124.9 *-0.1* 17.12.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes/MTRC notes				
Terms	Yield	Terms	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.21	2 years	2811	5.72	100.11	5.73
1 month	4.35	3 years	3910	6.28	100.60	6.13
3 months	4.63	5 years	5112	6.57	99.52	6.80
6 months	4.89	7 years	7311	6.80	99.00	7.11
12 months	5.16	10 years	1610	7.37	101.05	7.35
		5 years	M503	7.35	101.61	7.06

Total turnover of ef bills and notes - \$12,360 mn

Closed December 17, 1996

End