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Transcript of the Governor's media session

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Following is the transcript of the media session by the Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, after attending a youth forum organised by RTHK this (Tuesday) afternoon:

Question: (on the Yunnan earthquake)

Governor: I know that everyone in Hong Kong has been deeply disturbed by the reports about the earthquake and its aftermath. In a typically generous way, people in Hong Kong are responding with charity helping the Red Cross, Oxfam and other organisations which are involved in dealing with the earthquake. We've already, as you know, announced that we'll be contributing from the Government's disaster fund. I think that's what the community would want us to do. It's important to get one's help in quickly, but obviously if more is required later on, we'll want to be as generous as possible. So I just want to repeat that Hong Kong will on this occasion, I know, show itself to be as generous as it has been on previous ones. All our thoughts and prayers go to those who have suffered bereavement or suffered other sorts of loss on this terrible natural disaster.

Question: (on MPF)

Governor: I think the Secretary for Financial Services has made the position absolutely clear on the MPF. If the Legislative Council gives it the thumbs down, then there's nothing more the Government can do for the time being. We'll have to wait until wiser thoughts prevail. But nobody should be under any illusion about where the responsibility for that lies. In the last year -- or the last years -- we've seen legislators give their thumbs down to a pension scheme. So we introduced in good faith an MPF. I very much hope that scheme will be launched properly. It's in the interests of Hong Kong. It's in the interests of the elderly today and the elderly tomorrow in Hong Kong. I didn't say any of that in a provocative or bitter way. It's just a statement of fact.

Question: (on the third quarter economic growth)

Governor: The last unemployment figures, I think you'll recall, were slightly lower than the previous ones. We've been predicting, as you know, five per cent growth for the last year. Since the figures for the beginning of the year were well above five per cent, it's not surprising that the figures later in the year are below. We still think the figures will be round about five per cent and we don't have any reason for changing our forecasts for this year or beyond. They are not figures which are as high as they've been in Hong Kong for the last three or four years, but by OECD standards they are still pretty good. In Europe at present they're talking about two, two and a half per cent economic growth. I'm not sure what the figures are in Canada, but I'd be amazed if they were as high as four or five per cent. And of course they're not that high in the United States either. So what we've got to do is to keep trying to make the right and prudent and responsible economic decisions. And I think we've got to recognise the importance of confidence especially at this particular time in Hong Kong's economic management. We are imprisoning all those young people, aren't we? I mustn't answer any more. Thank you very much.

End

Governor pays tribute to Michael Sze

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The Governor, the Rt Hon Christopher Patten, today (Tuesday) paid tribute to the outgoing Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Michael Sze following his last meeting as an official member of the Executive Council.

Mr Patten said: "Michael Sze has been an outstanding civil servant who can look back on 26 years of public service with great satisfaction. The community has recognised his contributions in many areas of public service during his distinguished career.

"I am particularly grateful to him for the consistently sound and insightful advice he has given me as an official member of the Executive Council over the last three years.

"I shall miss his wise counsel both as a civil servant and as a member of the Executive Council, but I am comforted by the fact that he will continue to contribute his considerable talents and experience to the community in his new role as Executive Director of the Trade Development Council."

End

Improvements to legal services to be implemented

* * * * *

The Government has obtained clear public support for most of its provisional recommendations to improve the delivery of legal services in Hong Kong, including a proposal to abolish scale fees in conveyancing work. These improvements have either been implemented or are set to be implemented.

Announcing government plans for implementation of the proposals today (Tuesday), the Attorney General, Mr Jeremy Mathews, said 34 of the 40 recommendations that were discussed in the consultation paper issued in March last year had had clear public support.

There was clear public opposition to only one recommendation and public views were evenly divided in respect of five recommendations.

This feedback from the public was obtained from direct submissions to the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) and from a public opinion survey of 1,000 households conducted by the Department of Applied Statistics and Operational Research of the City University of Hong Kong, supplemented by a survey of views expressed in the press.

The views submitted directly to AGC, at the conclusion of the four-month consultation exercise, showed a keen response - 37 submissions were made by institutions including the Law Society and Bar Association, 29 were made by lawyers and 21 were from individual members of the public, making a total of 87.

AGC has published a Report on Legal Services, which summarises the feedback received and makes proposals for the way forward. Copies of the report will be made available to members of the legal profession as well as the general public.

Focal issues

Two of the proposals that had clear public support - permitting solicitors to acquire extended rights of audience in the higher courts and abolishing scale fees in conveyancing work - were strongly opposed by the Bar Association and the Law Society respectively.

These two proposals were also the only issues raised at a meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services on January 9, 1996, at which the Attorney General announced the results of the consultation exercise.

In response to the proposal for extended rights of audience, 32 written submissions were made to AGC, of which only two, one from the Bar Association and another from a barrister, expressed opposition. It was not included in the public opinion survey on the advice of the survey organiser in order not to overload the questionnaire.

Although there are strong arguments in favour of the proposal, there are substantial arguments the other way, and the proposal would undoubtedly have some impact on the Bar.

"The Administration agrees that the strength and independence of the Bar are of great importance and does not wish to undermine them," Mr Mathews said.

"It will therefore conduct a further study of the state of the Bar in other common law jurisdictions where solicitors can acquire full rights of audience and further gauge the level of public support for this change before it makes a definite proposal."

As regards abolition of scale fees, Mr Mathews pointed out that the Law Society had been given ample time to submit its views on the proposals and there had been little basis or support for the arguments it put forward.

The Law Society itself recognises that there is a need to amend the scales and has commissioned a survey by an accounting firm into the effects on solicitors of rising property prices and rising overheads.

"The Administration will therefore prepare legislation to abolish scale fees for introduction to the Legislative Council this session.

"If the Law Society makes alternative proposals in respect of conveyancing fees that are fair to consumers and are not anti-competitive, before the legislation is introduced into the council, the Administration will give them careful consideration," Mr Mathews said.

He added that he was sure that in framing any proposals, the Law Society would want to recognise the clear public support for the abolition of scale fees.

Implementation by professional bodies

While public and media attention have been focused on only two issues, other proposals that will help to improve legal services also had public support. Some of these proposals had already been implemented by the Law Society and the Bar Association, Mr Mathews continued.

The Law Society has published a Guide to Professional Conduct which sets out standards of client care, including the provision of information costs.

The Bar Association has abolished the two-counsel rule; it has required all practising barristers to take out professional indemnity insurance; and it proposes to amend its Code of Conduct so that employed barristers may instruct practising barristers directly.

The Administration welcomed these initiative and would monitor the continuing implementation of these recommendations, Mr Mathews noted.

Furthermore, he said, since a number of other proposals that were supported by the public relate to matters of professional practice, the Administration would encourage the two professional bodies to implement them themselves.

These recommendations are:

- * advertising restrictions should be relaxed;
- * the Bar Association should actively encourage the dissemination of information about the services offered and fees charged by barristers;
- * there is a need to improve the standard of client care;
- * solicitors' firms should have a complaints-handling procedure; and
- * the Law Society and Bar Association should be able to investigate allegations of shoddy work and to require a legal practitioner to take specified remedial action.

Further study by Administration

AGC, on its part, will conduct further study into:

- * Retention of the status of Queen's Counsel (under a different name) The Administration continues to give support for this recommendation and for solicitors who acquire full rights of audience to be eligible to acquire the status. It will discuss with the Chief Justice, the Bar Association and the Law Society the best method of implementing it.

- * Abolition of the rule preventing a barrister from entering into a contract for the provision of his or her services as a barrister. The Administration continues to think there is merit in this proposal, although the Bar Association opposed it. It will continue to have discussions with the Association.
- * Legally invalidating contractual provisions, in respect of mortgages, requiring a borrower to pay the lender's legal costs. Although there is public support for the proposal, some of the objections to it need serious consideration.
- * Requiring interest on the account of a solicitors' clients that is not payable to the clients to be used to fund a Law Foundation. The establishment of such a foundation is a complex matter and the Administration will make further study of overseas models and to discuss the mechanics of such a scheme with local banks.
- * The problems of touting and commission-paying in respect of criminal defence work and conveyancing. The Administration will conduct a review in the first half of this year, having given the profession sufficient time to deal with the problems itself, to decide whether touting and commission-paying should be criminalised.

Implementation by legislation

Seven of the publicly supported recommendations will be implemented through legislation. They are:

- * to abolish scale fees in respect of conveyancing and probate work, and to prohibit the Law Society from creating non-statutory mandatory fee scale;
- * invalidating contractual provisions under the Consent and Non-consent Schemes requiring a buyer to pay a seller's legal costs;
- * requiring solicitors to pay interest to clients in certain situations;
- * giving the Law Society the power to make rules in respect of multi-disciplinary practices;
- * subject to rules, permitting solicitors to incorporate their practices with either limited or unlimited liability;

- * setting out non-discriminatory and standards-based criteria for admission as a barrister; and
- * to create a statutory fidelity fund to protect consumers from the dishonesty of solicitors or their employees.

A bill to create the statutory fidelity fund is expected to be introduced into the Legislative Council in the next session, in view of the longer time required for preparation of a legislative scheme.

Another bill to implement the other recommendations requiring legislation would be introduced into the council later in the current session, Mr Mathews said.

Recommendations not pursued forthwith

Mr Mathews noted that evenly divided views were held on the following recommendations:

- * conditional fees should be available in certain types of proceedings;
- * joint legal representation should be prohibited in respect of purchases under the Consent and Non-consent Schemes; mortgages; and leases; and
- * partnerships of local and foreign lawyers might now be permitted.

In view of the mixed feedback, the Administration will:

- * review the question of conditional fees in the future, after the new English scheme can be properly assessed;
- * reconsider the question of joint legal representation in respect of purchases one year after other developments related to conveyancing take place;
- * continue to examine the question of joint legal representation in respect of mortgages and leases and make a firm decision within this year; and
- * continue to monitor the progress of recent reforms in respect of foreign lawyers.

Mr Mathews added that the Administration would drop the one recommendation that was clearly opposed by the public: that limitations based on years of experience might be imposed on barristers' rights of audience in open court proceedings.

A number of recommendations did not involve any changes to the existing legal system and for this reason there would be no further action on them, he said.

End

Promotion of equal opportunities in action

* * * * *

The Government's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities is demonstrated by a track record of concrete action, the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Michael Suen, said today (Tuesday).

Speaking at a luncheon of the British Chamber of Commerce, Mr Suen cited as examples the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance and the Disability Discrimination Ordinance last year and the two recently released consultation papers on discrimination on the grounds of family status and sexual orientation.

"Equality of opportunity means giving all individuals an equal chance to exercise their rights and participate in society. Equal opportunities for all is a social ideal that all societies should strive to achieve.

"The Hong Kong Government is fully and unequivocally committed to the pursuit of this ideal. And I have no doubt that our commitment commands the full support of the people of Hong Kong," he said.

He called on the public to speak their mind in response to the consultation exercise on discrimination on the grounds of family status and sexual orientation, which will last until the end of March.

Public debate on discrimination in these areas was not confined to making written submissions in response to our consultation documents but also extended to speaking up in public for a point of view as forcefully as one could, Mr Suen said.

He recalled that the "Green Paper on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" in 1993 generated a lively public debate on gender issues and measures to further promote gender equality.

"The debates demonstrated that even with strong community support for the legislative approach to tackle a particular ground of discrimination, individual anti-discrimination provisions can be very contentious and need thorough consideration.

"Without such consideration, the end result may not command the consensus support in the community that legislation of this sort needs in order to work," he said.

Turning to the contents of the two consultation papers released last month, Mr Suen highlighted the areas of concern with respect to employment, as mentioned by groups representing single parents and homosexuals.

The relevant groups proposed a number of measures to address their concerns. They argued strongly for legislative protection against discrimination. On the other hand, representatives of employers' organisations and financial institutions expressed concerns about the legislative approach.

He emphasised that the Government did not have preconceived views on the possible measures outlined in the documents.

"There are no foregone conclusions to be drawn from reading between the lines. The conclusions, including whether or not to adopt a legislative approach, will only be arrived at when the consultation process ends," Mr Suen said.

As for the Private Members' Bills which some Legislative Council members have indicated that they will introduce to outlaw discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including those the Government has already undertaken to study, Mr Suen said the Administration shared the purpose of these Legislative Councillors in seeking to promote equal opportunities.

"Discrimination is something which we should all work to eliminate. However, by its very nature, discrimination is closely associated with a person's values and beliefs," he said.

"Understandably, the debate on measures to tackle discrimination can become emotive at times. Nevertheless, as a responsible Government, it is essential that we should tackle this subject in a calm, considered and responsible manner."

Mr Suen said the Government's position in respect of addressing discrimination had been made clear to members of the Legislative Council on numerous occasions.

"It is very clear: anti-discrimination legislation is a new area of law in Hong Kong. The social, economic and legal implications of such legislation are not yet fully appreciated by the community at large," he said.

"It would not be prudent to legislate hastily without first giving the public a chance to examine the problems, analyse the policy options and assess their implications.

"We must also ensure the right social climate before seeking to impose new values and standards of behaviour on other members of our community."

Mr Suen said the Government was not rejecting the legislative approach in advance.

"However, we do have reservations about enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation without careful consideration and full public debate.

"We firmly believe that a measured and prudent approach is required for Hong Kong's circumstances," he said.

Mr Suen noted that the Administration had made substantial progress in recent years in the cause of equal opportunities for all, and not just on the legislative front.

The Government has devoted a great deal of effort to public education to foster changes in attitude with respect to equality of opportunity and a culture of genuine respect for other people's rights.

"I am confident that the future work in this area will be just as successful.

"But we need the assistance and participation of all the parties, including the business community, that have an interest in the issues involved," he added.

Earlier, Mr Suen pointed out that the consultation document on age discrimination, which is being drawn up by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, would follow in a month or so.

He added that the Government would turn to the subject of racial discrimination following work on these areas.

End

Proposal to pledge \$8M to aid earthquake victims approved

* * * * *

The Disaster Relief Fund Advisory Committee today (Tuesday) approved in principle a pledge of \$8 million to fund relief projects to assist earthquake victims in Lijiang and Zhongdian areas in Yunnan, China.

In making the decision, the Committee has been greatly concerned about the severity of the earthquake, the devastation that resulted and the harsh conditions which the victims have to face.

A government spokesman explained that the pledge was an indication of the willingness of the Committee to approve grants for this purpose.

"The actual funds to be allocated will depend on the applications the Committee receives from relief organisations with sound track records and on their proposed plans for relief work in the affected area," the spokesman said.

"To ensure that the grants will be used for the purpose designated, the Hong Kong Government will as usual require relief organisations in receipt of a grant to submit an evaluation report and an audited account on the use of the fund."

So far, the Advisory Committee Secretariat has received an application from the Hong Kong Red Cross for a grant of \$4.1 million for immediate emergency relief by the Red Cross Society of China.

This application is now being processed. Four other relief agencies have expressed an interest in making applications.

The spokesman pointed out that public donations and appropriations from general revenue were the main sources of the fund.

"Members of the public are welcome to donate to the fund for general relief purposes," he said.

Further enquiries can be made to the Secretary to the Disaster Relief Fund Advisory Committee in Room 553, East Wing, Central Government Offices or on 2810 3503.

End

Realignment of Black Point power line not justified

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The Governor-in-Council has decided that there is no justification to continue the discussions with China Light and Power Company Limited (CLP) about the possibility of re-routing the approved alignment of the Black Point 400kV Transmission System at the Fei Ngo Shan and Yick Yuen sections.

The decision was taken after the Executive Council had considered carefully the advice of the Working Group on Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF) comprising experts from the Government, the two power companies and three local universities, and the assessment by the Administration and CLP on the possibility of realignment at Fei Ngo Shan and Yick Yuen.

In formulating the advice, the Working Group reviewed the most up-to-date EMF studies and reviews conducted by authoritative international organisations and independent scientific panels and found no conclusive evidence of adverse EMF effects on health. This is also the international mainstream scientific view and has been confirmed by the Director of Health.

The Executive Council also took into account the fact that the Government and CLP had acted prudently in the design of the Black Point Transmission System.

A government spokesman said: "Acting prudently means the taking of steps to managing and minimising exposure to EMF when such steps can be taken without substantial costs or other technical or societal consequences.

"We have routed the transmission system away from densely populated areas as far as practicable and CLP has adopted a low EMF power line design and constructed power line pylons taller than required to bring the cable farther away from residences.

"As a result, the calculated magnetic field level below the power line at Yick Yuen Tsuen in Tuen Mun, and at Clearwater Bay Apartments and Flamingo Gardens in Fei Ngo Shan will be around 20 to 200 times lower than the level recommended in the guidelines published by the authoritative International Radiation Protection Association in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1990."

The spokesman said that in Fei Ngo Shan area, no building structure is oversailed by the power line. The closest structure will be about 40 metres away from the overhead power line.

The validity of the EMF guidelines was re-confirmed by the WHO and the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) in April 1995.

The spokesman said: "In view of the prudence adopted in the design of the transmission system, the absence of conclusive scientific evidence about the health effect of EMF, and the problems associated with realignment, there is no justification to re-route the power line at high costs to be borne by electricity consumers or tax payers."

The realignment proposed by the residents at the Fei Ngo Shan section could cost up to \$1 billion while that for the Yick Yuen section could cost \$106 million. Moreover, a realignment without valid justification will create fresh objections from those living near the new route.

The spokesman said that the Governor-in-Council authorised the transmission system in early 1994 after an extensive consultation on the proposed alignment with relevant bodies including district boards, rural committees, area committees, Country Parks Board and village representatives, and publication in the press. This was in line with Government practice.

The spokesman added that the Working Group on EMF will keep in close touch with authoritative national institutions and scientific panels such as the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurement of the USA, the National Radiological Protection Board of the UK, WHO and ICNIRP with a view to continuing monitoring the latest development on EMF studies.

End

Tuition fees set for UGC-funded institutions course

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The Government today (Tuesday) announced that the tuition fees for degree and sub-degree courses at tertiary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) will be set at \$37,350 and \$28,000 in the 1996-97 academic year.

At these fee levels, which are slightly lower than those indicated last year, the Government will recover 16.5 per cent of the recurrent costs of providing degree level education to local students through UGC-funded institutions.

A government spokesman explained that the lower than anticipated fee levels had been achieved as a result of the Administration's efforts to contain the costs of tertiary education by deciding not to spend \$277 million on extending new Civil Service housing benefits to the staff of the tertiary institutions.

In deciding the actual and indicative tuition fee levels, the Government has considered the results of a review on the existing tertiary tuition fee policy and the progress made by UGC and its funded tertiary institutions in containing the costs of tertiary education.

The spokesman said while tertiary education represented an investment of the community in its future generations, it was also an investment by the present students in their personal development and career prospects.

"The Government needs to ensure a reasonable balance between the community and the students in sharing the costs of tertiary education.

"We consider it a modest target to recover from the students 16.5 per cent of the recurrent costs, especially when the non-cash-limited Local Student Finance Scheme (LSFS) is available to ensure that no qualified student is barred from tertiary education because of a lack of means," he said.

In the 1990-91 academic year, the Government was spending \$45.5 million on grants and \$85.4 million on loans under LSFS. By the 1995-96 academic year, the respective figures have risen to \$782 million and \$878.2 million.

Over the past five years, the Government has increased first-year-first-degree places at UGC-funded institutions by 69 per cent from 8,575 in 1990-91 to 14,500 in 1995-96.

The expenditure on tertiary education stands at \$9.6 billion in the current financial year, which amounts to 33 per cent of the recurrent education budget.

The rapid expansion and upgrading of tertiary education from 1990-91 to 1995-96 has resulted in a real increase of 23.9 per cent (that is an average real increase of 4.4 per cent per annum) in student unit cost, which is determined by dividing the total recurrent expenditure of the UGC-funded institutions by their total number of full time equivalent students.

This rise in unit cost reflects an increased investment in research and teaching activities, highly qualified staff, and modern facilities.

"It is the Government's intention to achieve the 18 per cent target recurrent cost recovery rate by 1997-98 according to the phased plan laid down in 1991," said the spokesman.

"We intend to maintain tuition fees for degree courses at 18 per cent of the recurrent costs of tertiary education thereafter, which we consider to be a reasonable balance in sharing the costs between the students and the community."

The actual fee levels for 1996-97 and the indicative fee levels for the three subsequent academic years from 1997-98 to 1999-2000 are given as follows:

Academic Year	Degree course	Sub-degree course	% increase in fee over preceding year	* Recurrent cost recovery rate on degree courses
Actual fee				
1996-97	\$37,350	\$28,000	21.5%	16.5%
Indicative fees				
1997-98	\$43,100	\$32,325	15.4%	18.0%
1998-99	\$47,150	\$35,365	9.5%	18.0%
1999-2000	\$51,650	\$38,740	9.5%	18.0%

* Fees for Sub-degree courses are set at 75% of those for degree courses.

The figures indicated that the rate of annual increase was expected to level off in the years leading up to the end of the century, the spokesman said.

To ensure that no qualified student would be denied a tertiary place due to a lack of means, a number of significant improvements have been made to the system of student financial assistance, the most recent of which was the introduction of the Extended Loan Scheme (ELS) in October 1995.

It is estimated that in 1995-96, some 64 per cent of the total student population will receive assistance. The students will receive an estimated average of \$22,977 in grants and/or \$23,603 in loans.

More than 6,000 students will also benefit from the ELS. Among them, about 1,000 students who will otherwise fail to qualify for any assistance will receive an estimated average loan of \$13,550 under the scheme.

While tertiary tuition fees have risen, so has the level of average grants provided by the Government to help students meet their fee payment and academic expenses.

The increase in student grants and loans between 1990-91 and 1995-96 have generally kept up with the increases in tuition fees and the costs of living.

To assess whether the system of student financial assistance continues to meet the needs of the students, the Government has commissioned a consultancy study which is part of an ongoing review of LSFS.

The consultancy report is expected to be submitted to the Joint Committee on Student Finance by the end of March, and the Committee will then consider making recommendations to the Administration later this year.

The spokesman stressed that the Government was committed to ensuring the cost-effectiveness of the UGC-funded institutions.

"We note that the UGC has already taken several initiatives to enhance the cost-effectiveness of the public tertiary sector.

"The Administration has asked the Committee to consider how costs may be further contained or reduced without affecting or impeding the improvement programme of higher education in Hong Kong," he said.

End

Harbour safety and traffic arrangement for fireworks display

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The Marine Department together with the Marine Police and Fire Services Department will implement a series of marine safety measures in Victoria Harbour on Lunar New Year fireworks display on February 20 (Tuesday).

The fireworks will be discharged from four barges moored off the waterfront of Wan Chai at 8 pm and will last for about 23 minutes.

Announcing details of the safety measures at a press conference today (Tuesday), Senior Marine Officer (Central Region) of the Marine Department, Mr Tsang Cheuk-yin, said from previous experience, it was envisaged that a large number of vessels carrying people to watch the display would assemble in Victoria Harbour in that evening.

Last year, the department had recorded more than 300 small craft gathering in the central harbour for viewing the fireworks display.

Mr Tsang said: "In order to ensure safety of life at sea, to maintain orderly waterborne traffic and to be in a position to offer immediate assistance to vessels, the Marine Department had co-ordinated efforts with the Marine Police and Fires Services Department, and would be adopting various safety measures on the day of the display."

He said a restricted area would be established immediately before and after the display and there would be two sterile areas at Kowloon Public Pier and Queen's Pier respectively from 8 pm to 9.30 pm.

The four barges for this year's event will be anchored in the Western Dangerous Goods Anchorage.

They will be towed under Marine Police escort from the anchorage to Wan Chai around noon on February 20 and then moored - two to harbour mooring buoy A50 and two to naval mooring buoy No 2.

"An area encompassing these barges will be established as a closed area from 2 pm to 9 pm. The boundary of this closed area is about 300 metres from the barges and in a single rectangle shaped area," said Mr Tsang.

During the closure period the area will be closed to all marine traffic except those directly involved in the fireworks display and government vessels.

"Masters of all vessels should bear in mind the temporary establishment of this closed area and navigate outside the boundary," said Mr Tsang.

Because of numerous marine works being carried out in central Victoria Harbour, this part will be designated as a restricted area from 7 pm to 9 am on February 20.

The restricted area is bounded on the east side by a straight line joining Hung Hom Railway Station Cargo Pier and the breakwater of Kellet Island near the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, Causeway Bay.

The western boundary is a straight line joining the southeast extremity of Ocean Terminal, Tsim Sha Tsui, and a new government pier east of Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan.

"During the period of restriction, no vessels other than government launches, vessels directly involved in the fireworks display and vessels which have obtained special permission from the Director of Marine will be allowed to anchor or to be underway within the restricted area," said Mr Tsang.

"Special permission will only be given to public transport vessels and those for the essential operation of the port. Applications from vessels for viewing the display will not be entertained."

Should there be any postponement due to inclement weather conditions, the fireworks display will be held on February 21. In this case the closed area and restricted area will be effective during the same periods on February 21.

Mr Tsang reminded all vessel masters that there were a lot of marine works in progress within Victoria Harbour and the Central Fairway had been re-positioned southward temporarily as promulgated in Notice to Mariners and Marine Department Notices.

He warned that as there were hazards to surface navigation within the works areas, vessels should not enter into these areas marked by yellow colour buoys with yellow flashing lights.

Mr Tsang also said when navigating through the central harbour, vessels should, as far as safe and practicable, use the principal fairways and keep to the right sides of the fairways.

Furthermore, vessels should avoid crossing the Central Fairway as it is expected the through traffic will be heavy.

For assisting landward crowd control, landing steps at Queen's Pier, Lung King Street steps, Wan Chai steps, Kowloon Public Pier and Tsim Sha Tsui East promenade will be closed to marine traffic from 7 pm to 9 pm and Hung Hom East steps from 7 pm to 8.30 pm.

As it was expected that all public landings close to the central harbour would be heavily used and congestion might occur, Mr Tsang urged vessels, if possible, to use landings in areas away from the central harbour.

The establishment of sterile areas at Queen's Pier and Kowloon Public Pier receptively from 8 pm to 9.30 pm will ensure safe navigation and orderly disembarkation of passengers after the fireworks display.

Physically marked by the deployment of Marine Police launches to line up offshore, the two sterile areas will include water areas fronting the piers and to a distance of about 70 metres offshore.

Mr Tsang said a vessel intending to use either of the piers was required to wait at a designated gathering area prior to berthing.

It would only be permitted to enter under the direction of Marine Department and Marine Police launches the sterile area from the east and depart from the west, he added.

He said the two landing steps at the western end of Kowloon Public Pier would be closed to all vessels until 9.30 pm.

Arrangements have been made to suspend the scheduled ferry services in the central harbour between 7.30 pm and 9 pm while some will be rescheduled as early as 6 pm and some will not resume normal until 9 pm.

Some ferry companies will use their vessels for watching the fireworks display. These larger size vessels will be positioned well to the east outside the restricted area, in the sea area between Hung Hom and Causeway Bay.

The Marine Department has published a Marine Department Notice No 13 of 1996 to give full details of the special marine control measures. Free copies of the notice are available from the Victoria Marine Office on the third floor, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Hong Kong.

Mr Tsang strongly recommended those intending to sail their vessels into the central harbour on the fireworks display day to get copies of the notice and read it before commencing their voyages.

He also offered professional advice to masters, owners and operators of vessels.

Small vessels, particularly those with no decking, or small vessels of a length less than five metres should not proceed to or remain in the envisaged heavy traffic central harbour area in the evening of the fireworks display since such vessels are vulnerable to the wash from larger vessels.

Before proceeding on a voyage, a master should make sure that:

- * All persons know where the life saving appliances are and know how to put on life jackets properly. A practical demonstration is recommended.
- * All children should wear life jackets at all times.

- * A list of the names of all passengers on board is available for immediate use in case of emergency.
- * The vessel should not be overloaded its licensed passenger capacity.

Mr Tsang said when underway in Victoria Harbour, all vessels should observe the regulations for preventing collisions at sea.

"In the evening of the fireworks display, the safe speed to proceed should not exceed five knots while a proper look-out must be maintained at all times.

"During darkness, bright light interferes with keeping a proper look-out. Therefore, cabin lights should be switched off and searchlights should not be used," he said.

Mr Tsang pointed out that there would be a large number of Marine Department, Marine Police and Fire Services vessels identified by their flashing red or blue lights either stationed or patrolling in the central harbour area.

Masters should follow any instructions originated from these vessels.

In the event of a vessel is in danger and requires assistance, its master can:

- * Call the Marine Department on very high frequency radio telephone channel 16 using the callsign "Hong Kong Rescue", or on 2545 0181.
- * Call the Marine Police on 2366 5827 or 2368 8770.
- * Call 999.
- * Indicate the need of assistance using distress signals.

End

Bedspace apartment operator convicted of harassment

* * * * *

Operators of bedspace apartments (BSAs) were warned today (Tuesday) that eviction of their tenants through intimidation was a criminal offence and would not be tolerated by the Home Affairs Department.

The department issued the warning after a BSA operator at Fuk Lo Tsun Road in Kowloon City was yesterday convicted of four charges of harassment of tenants under the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance. He was fined a total of \$12,000.

A spokesman for the department said the conviction sent a very clear signal to BSA operators that they could not force their tenants out by intimidation under the pretext of complying with the safety requirements of the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance.

"Other BSA lodgers should bear in mind that they have rights to security of tenure and should not give that up when faced with unlawful removal," he said.

"They are well-protected by the Landlords and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance which provides for a maximum penalty of \$500,000.

"The department will continue to co-operate with the police against those operators who evict their tenants unlawfully," the spokesman stressed.

He added that the department would press ahead with the licensing of all BSAs and would adhere to its commitment that nobody would be rendered homeless because of the licensing scheme.

End

Forum for visual arts candidates to voice platform

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Candidates vying to be selected as representative of the visual arts field for the Governor's consideration for appointment as a member of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council will explain their platforms to the voters tomorrow (Wednesday).

A candidate forum will be held from 5.30 pm to 7 pm at the Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Road, Central.

The five candidates running for the seat are Mr Kan Tat-keung, Mr Lo Koon-chiu, Ms Kam-ping Hiller, Mr Eddie Lui Fung-ngar and Mr Chu Tat-shing.

The number of registered voters drawing from 38 visual arts organisations under the Hong Kong Visual Arts Nomination Conference stands at 1,340.

The election will be held from 10 am to 7 pm on Sunday (February 11) at the lobby of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

Voters who have been informed by letters of the details of the election must cast their votes in person and should bring along their Identity cards for verification.

End

Contract awarded for new airport mail centre

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A \$327 million Airport Core Programme (ACP) contract for the construction of the new air mail centre at Chek Lap Kok has been awarded to Yau Lee Construction Company Ltd.

"The new air mail centre will replace the existing one at Kai Tak Airport upon the opening of the new airport at Chek Lap Kok," said the Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman.

"The new air mail centre will be equipped with a comprehensive postal mechanisation system which will help maintain the high quality of the airmail service in the face of ever growing traffic and achieve greater operational efficiency.

"The Hong Kong Post Office is already one of the biggest postal administrations in the world in terms of international mail volume, and ranks third in the world in terms of the volume of Speedpost traffic handled."

The postal mechanisation system, which incorporates state-of-the-art technology in postal mechanisation, consists of the most modern sorting equipment for letters, packets, parcels and Speedpost items, a dedicated storage and retrieval system for mail bags, advanced equipment for handling airline containers as well as a comprehensive mail conveyance system to speed up the transportation and processing of various categories of mail.

The airmail operation at the new air mail centre will be fully mechanised.

Mr Footman, senior officials of the Hong Kong Post Office and the Architectural Services Department were present at the traditional-work-commencement ceremony held by the building contractor at the Chek Lap Kok site today (February 6).

End

US and Australian stamps to celebrate Year of the Rat

* * * * *

The Assistant Postmaster General, Mr Allan Chiang, today (Tuesday) announced that stamps products issued by the Australia Post and the United States Postal Service for celebrating the Year of the Rat will be on sale at the following philatelic offices as from February 9:

Airport Post Office
Beaconsfield House Post Office
General Post Office
Granville Road Post Office
Peak Post Office
Sha Tin Central Post Office
Tsim Sha Tsui Post Office
Tsuen Wan Post Office
Airport Post Office

These products include the Year of the Rat miniature sheet and serviced first day cover issued by the Australia Post for Christmas Island and the Year of the Rat stamps issued by the United States Postal Service.

The miniature sheet issued by the Australia Post comprises two stamps with the same face value of Aus 45 cents. The serviced first day cover has the miniature sheet affixed and bears the special postmark of January 9, the first day of issue.

The United States Year of the Rat stamps, with a face value of US 32 cents, are in sheets of 20 stamps.

On February 9, a sales restriction on the maximum quantity that a queuing customer can buy will be imposed as follows:

<u>Product</u>	<u>Restriction</u>
Christmas Island miniature sheet	20 sheets
serviced first day cover	20 covers
United States sheet of 20 stamps	10 sheets
Year of the Rat	

The selling prices are:

Christmas Island miniature sheet	HK\$5.5
serviced first day cover	HK\$7
United States sheet of 20 stamps	HK\$50
Year of the Rat	

End

Poster to promote technical school open days

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A colourful poster designed by a secondary 4 student won the first prize in the Government Secondary Technical School (GSTS) Inter-School poster design completion.

The winner, Miss Luen Lai-mei, is an art-stream student of the Jockey Club Government Secondary Technical School.

The poster - publicising open day at nine Government Technical Schools - have been put up in nine Government Secondary Technical Schools, government primary schools and District Education Offices.

The poster is aimed at inviting members of the public, particularly students and parents of primary 6 students to visit the open day that will enable them to have a better understanding of the curricula at Government Technical schools as well study and career prospects of graduating students.

The open days for the nine GSTS are as follows:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| * Ho Tung Technical School for Girls | February 7 |
| * Kowloon Technical School | February 8 |
| * Lung Cheung GSTS | February 8 |
| * Shau Kei Wan GSTS | February 8 |
| * Ha Kwai Chung GSTS | February 9 |
| * Sheung Kwai Chung GSTS | April 3 |
| * Jockey Club GSTS | April 25-26 |
| * Tang Shiu Kin Victoria Technical School | April 26-27 |
| * Kwun Tong GSTS | May 2 |

End

Exhibition to promote food safety

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Members of the public can obtain more information on food safety and nutrition by visiting the "1996 Food Safety Exhibition" to be held at the City Hall and Tsuen Wan Town Hall in the coming weeks.

Jointly organised by the Department of Health, Urban Council and Regional Council, the exhibition is aimed at promoting public awareness and knowledge on food safety and nutrition.

Bearing the theme "Be a wise consumer, know more about food safety", the exhibition will be held at the Exhibition Hall of the City Hall from February 8 to 12 and will move to the Exhibition Gallery of Tsuen Wan Town Hall from February 28 to March 3.

The exhibition will be open to the public from 10 am to 6 pm except February 8 (from 3 pm to 6 pm).

A spokesman for the Department of Health said: "By participating in this exhibition, members of the public can know more about food safety, food hygiene, food labelling, food additives and nutrition; and as a result, the consumers will be able to make a wise choice of food."

There will be displays of exhibition boards and models on a wide variety of topics including food contamination, legal control on food additives and labelling, how to avoid obesity, baby and child diet, food selection and handling.

In addition, there will be audio-visual shows, computer game stalls to make the event more entertaining.

Free education and information leaflets will be distributed.

End

Mrs Patten visits women's prison

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Mrs Lavender Patten today (Tuesday) paid a visit to the Tai Lam Centre for Women (TLCW), to see the management and operation of Hong Kong's only maximum security prison for adult female offenders.

Accompanied by the Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Raymond Lai Ming-kee, and the Senior Superintendent (Tai Lam), Mr John Kwok Wing-chiu, Mrs Patten visited the reception office, laundry, garment-making workshop, dining hall, kitchen, beauty saloon, centre hospital, Children Play Centre, cells and dormitories of the institution.

After speaking to some inmates, Mrs Patten has a better understanding on their daily life.

At present, TLCW housed about 580 female inmates where its certified accommodation is 263.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority tender results

Tender date	6 Feb 96
Paper on offer	EF bills
Issue number	Q606
Issue date	7 Feb 96
Maturity date	8 May 96
Amount applied	HK\$11,520 MN
Amount allotted	HK\$1,500 MN
Average yield accepted	5.10 PCT
Highest yield accepted	5.10 PCT
Pro rata ratio	About 21 PCT
Average tender yield	5.11 PCT

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

Tenders to be held in the week beginning 12 Feb, 1996

Tender date	12 Feb 96	13 Feb 96	13 Feb 96
Paper on offer	EF notes	EF bills	EF bills
Issue number	2802	Q607	H658
Issue date	13 Feb 96	14 Feb 96	14 Feb 96
Maturity date	13 Feb 98	15 May 96	14 Aug 96
Tenor	2 Years	91 days	182 days
Amount on offer	HK\$500+100 MN	HK\$1,500+500 MN	HK\$800+160 MN
Coupon	5.16 PCT		

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

	<u>\$ million</u>	<u>Time (hours)</u>	<u>Cumulative change (\$million)</u>
Opening balance in the account	2,775	0930	-272
Closing balance in the account	2,953	1000	-272
Change attributable to :		1100	-272
Money market activity	-272	1200	-272
LAF today	+450	1500	-272
		1600	-272

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.4 *-0.3* 6.2.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	5.07	2 years	2711	5.60	100.82	5.17
1 month	5.10	3 years	3901	5.57	100.70	5.38
3 months	5.12	5 years	5012	6.38	102.47	5.87
6 months	5.12	7 years	7211	6.82	104.00	6.18
12 months	5.10	5 years	M502	7.30	105.00	6.16

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - \$14,149 million

Closed February 6, 1996

End