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## DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Government's response on "act of state"

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In answer to media enquiries on remarks attributed to Sir S.Y.Chung that the NPC's decision to form the provisional legislature is an "act of state" which would fall outside the jurisdiction of the SAR courts, a Government spokesman responded as follows:

"The comments of Sir S.Y. Chung are a cause of great concern. They suggest that all the guarantees written into the Basic Law can be overridden by decisions of the NPC, and that the courts of the HKSAR would be powerless to question the legality of such decisions. If this were true, it would be a devastating blow to the concept of one country, two systems; to the rule of law; and to confidence in Hong Kong's future.

"As a general rule, it will be the courts of the HKSAR which will determine whether an act is or is not an act of state.

"Under the common law, 'acts of state' refer to certain acts of the Executive. A legislative act by a legislative assembly, such as the NPC, would not be an act of state.

"It is deeply disturbing that such a senior and influential figure in the future executive branch of the SAR Government should be making public statements about the work of the judicial branch which could have the effect of undermining the rule of law in the territory after June 30, 1997. This looks like an attempt to lay down the law as to what the courts of the SAR can or cannot deal with after July 1, 1997.

"Comments of this kind risk damaging confidence in Hong Kong at a time when those in responsible positions should be doing their best to provide reassurance about the fundamentals guaranteed in the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law."

End

Voluntary inspection scheme for buildings under 20 years

\* \* \* \* \*

The Buildings Department will introduce a voluntary inspection scheme for buildings under 20 years old in mid-April to promote their preventive maintenance, the Director of Buildings, Dr Choi Yu-leuk, said today (Thursday).

Speaking at a press conference, Dr Choi said this was part of a proposed Building Safety Inspection Scheme endorsed by the Governor-in-Council for public consultation.

"The Government is determined to ensure building safety and to achieve this, it is essential for owners to inspect and maintain their properties regularly," he said.

He stressed that proper maintenance of buildings was not only in the interest of public safety but also enhanced their value.

"We propose an inspection cycle of five, seven and ten years for industrial/godown, domestic/composite and commercial buildings respectively," Dr Choi said.

"Inspection of buildings should focus on structural strength and stability, conditions of the external wall finishes, adequacy of the fire resistant construction and means of escape for ensuring fire safety, and whether there is overloading of building structures," he said.

Under the voluntary inspection scheme, the Buildings Department will send letters to building owners or owners' corporations encouraging them to appoint Authorised Persons or Registered Structural Engineers to inspect their properties.

A practice note is being prepared for issue to building professionals, setting out clear technical guidelines and standards for inspection, assessment and repairs.

This will form the basis for the inspections to be carried out by building professionals and subsequent scrutiny by the Buildings Department.

"We will consider issuing a letter of satisfaction, which can be registered with the Land Registry upon receipt of an inspection report from the Authorised Person or Registered Structural Engineer demonstrating that a building is in a satisfactory condition," Dr Choi said.

"The letter of satisfaction may provide an incentive for voluntary inspection as it can give a certain degree of safety assurance and may also have a bearing on the decisions of prospective property buyers and tenants, and on financial institutions in considering mortgage applications," he said.

"Where the inspection reports recommend maintenance or repair works, we will examine the recommendations as to whether such works are necessary. The owners will then either be advised on the works, or if the situation so warrants, be served with repair orders," he added.

The proposed Building Safety Inspection Scheme also includes provisions for mandatory inspection of buildings over 20 years of age.

According to Dr Choi, there are some 50,000 private buildings in the urban areas, and about half of them are over 20 years old.

Under the proposed mandatory inspection scheme, if and when implemented, owners of the target buildings will be served with notices setting out the time for the inspection reports to reach the Buildings Department.

"At present, we shall focus on consultation with the professional bodies to ensure the technical standards for inspection and repairs are sound and feasible."

"Then we will announce the administrative arrangements of the proposed mandatory inspection scheme for public consultation in July," Dr Choi said.

End

#### Exchange Fund records healthy growth

\* \* \* \* \*

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) today (Thursday) announced the audited results of the Exchange Fund at end-1996 with total assets of the Fund up 16% to HK\$534.5 bn (1995: HK\$460.7 bn) and a 7.9% growth in accumulated earnings. Accumulated earnings in the Exchange Fund increased from HK\$160.1 bn as at end-1995 to HK\$172.8 bn at the end of last year, an increase of HK\$12.7 bn.

"The HK\$12.7 bn increase in accumulated earnings reflected the result of HKMA's prudent management of the Fund at times of volatile bond markets and a strong US dollar. The investment in US equities also contributed to the earnings as that market rallied strongly in 1996," said an HKMA spokesman.

"The outlook for 1997 remains uncertain. Market consensus that US interest rates may increase in 1997, coupled with the strength in the US dollar will impact on the Fund's performance in 1997."

"The HKMA will maintain its prudent policy and continue to invest the majority of the Fund's assets in fixed income instruments," the HKMA spokesman added.

The HKMA also announced today the foreign currency assets (i.e. foreign reserves) within the Exchange Fund totalled US\$63.8 bn as at end of February 1997. This represented a drop from the US\$65.9 bn figure as at end-January due to seasonal factors.

Exchange Fund Balance Sheet  
as at 31 December 1996

	1996	1995
	<u>HK\$ MILLION</u>	<u>HK\$ MILLION</u>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and short-term funds	126,648	100,343
Fixed deposits	63,401	76,830
Certificates of deposit	64,065	23,657
Investment	270,869	250,702
Fixed assets	166	58
Other assets	9,368	9,144
	-----	-----
Total Assets	534,517	460,734
	=====	=====
Total Assets (by allocation):		
Foreign currency assets	493,802	428,547
Hong Kong dollar assets	40,715	32,187
	-----	-----
	534,517	460,734
	=====	=====
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Certificates of Indebtedness	82,480	77,600
Coins in circulation	4,164	3,597
Balance of banking system	474	1,762
Exchange Fund Bills and Notes	83,509	53,125
Fiscal Reserves Account	145,898	125,916
Placements by other institutions	39,125	34,302
Other liabilities	6,005	4,298
	-----	-----
Total Liabilities	361,655	300,600
	-----	-----
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	172,862	160,134
	=====	=====
<b>REPRESENTING ACCUMULATED</b>		
<b>SURPLUS</b>	172,862	160,134
	=====	=====

Exchange Fund Income and Expenditure Account  
for the year ended 31 December 1996

	1996 <u>HK\$ MILLION</u>	1995 <u>HK\$ MILLION</u>
<b>INCOME</b>		
Investment income	25,384	46,734
Licence fees	173	176
Others	23	104
	-----	-----
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<u>25,580</u>	<u>47,014</u>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Note and coin expenses	165	352
Operating expenses	518	440
Interest	12,169	11,862
	-----	-----
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<u>12,852</u>	<u>12,654</u>
	-----	-----
<b>SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR</b>	<u>12,728</u>	<u>34,360</u>
<b>STATEMENT OF ACCUMULATED SURPLUS</b>		
Accumulated surplus brought forward	160,134	125,774
Surplus for the year	12,728	34,360
	-----	-----
<b>ACCUMULATED SURPLUS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<u>172,862</u>	<u>160,134</u>

End

### Appointments to the Housing Authority

\* \* \* \* \*

The Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, announced today (Thursday) that the Governor has reappointed 13 serving members, including the Chairman, and appointed a new member to the Hong Kong Housing Authority for a term of two years with effect from April 1, 1997.

The Governor has also appointed the Director of Lands as an official member of the Authority in place of the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands.

The reappointed members are:

Hon Dame Rosanna Wong, DBE, JP (Chairman)  
Mr Victor So Hing-woh, JP  
Mr Hau Shui-pui  
Mr Leung Chun-ying  
Ms Ho On-nei  
Mr Chan Kam-man, JP  
Mr Nicholas Brooke, JP  
Mr Daniel Lam Chun, JP  
Mr Yeung Ka-sing, JP  
Mr Anthony Wong Luen-kin  
Mr Raymond Chow Wai-kam, JP  
Mr Eddy Fong Ching, JP  
Dr Joseph Lian Yi-zheng

The newly appointed member is Miss Iris Tam Siu-ying. She is a town planner and has wide experience in the field of housing.

"The Housing Authority is a very important provider of subsidised housing to people in genuine need," Mr Wong said. "It is desirable that members appointed to the Authority should maintain a good balance of professional expertise and community interests. The appointments made by the Governor will continue to provide this balance."

"The membership now includes professionals, management executives, an economist, social workers, public housing residents, and members of the Executive Council, Legislative Council, Municipal Council and District Boards ---- all in their personal capacities," he said.

End

### Reappointment of HA Chairman announced

\* \* \* \* \*

The Government announced today (Thursday) the reappointment of Mr Peter Woo Kwong-ching as the Chairman of the Hospital Authority (HA) for two years with effect from April 1, 1997.

Since his first appointment as Chairman in 1995, the work of the Authority has continued to gain wide public support with its core value of "quality patient-centred care through teamwork" taking firm root.

"Mr Woo's reappointment will further consolidate the progress made to date," the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, said.

Mr John Chan Cho-chak, who has rendered valuable advice to the Board since his appointment in April 1995, is also reappointed for a period of two years with effect from April 1, 1997.

The Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare was also reappointed.

To further broaden the representation of the Board, two new members, Dr Raymond Wu Wai-yung and Mr Frank Pong Fai, will be appointed for a period of two years with effect from the same date.

A respected private practitioner, Dr Wu has extensive public service in the rehabilitation field and is now the Chairman of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee.

Mr Pong has been active in different public services and is currently a member of the Board of the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation and the Hong Kong Sports Development Board.

Mrs Katherine Fok expressed regret that Miss Aw Sian would be stepping down from the Board due to her other heavy commitments and thanked Miss Aw for her invaluable contribution to the HA in the past years.

Mrs Fok was however delighted that Miss Aw has kindly agreed to continue to serve as the Chairman of the Hospital Governing Committee of the Hong Kong Eye Hospital.

She also thanked all incumbents for their unfailing support and invaluable advice throughout the years and looked forward to new members' participation in the improvement of the quality of patient care in Hong Kong.

The following is a full membership list of the Hospital Authority:

**Chairman**

Mr Peter WOO Kwong-ching, JP

**Members**

Mr John CHAN Cho-chak, CBE, LVO, JP

Miss Eliza CHAN Ching-har

Mrs Pamela CHAN WONG Shui, JP

Miss Iris CHAN Sui-ching

Dr CHOW Chun-bong

Mr Joseph CHOW Ming-kuen, JP

Professor CHOW Shew-ping, JP

The Hon Michael HO Mun-ka

Dr Conrad LAM Kui-shing, JP

Professor Joseph C K LEE

Dr the Hon LEONG Che-hung, OBE, JP

Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, OBE, JP

Professor the Hon Felice LIEH MAK, OBE, JP

Mrs Eleanor LING LI Ching-man, OBE, JP

Mrs Alice MAK CHAN Siu-hing

Mr Simon C PENNEY

Mr Frank PONG Fai

Mr Peter WONG Hong-yuen, OBE, JP

Dr Raymond WU Wai-yung, OBE, JP

Secretary for the Treasury or his representative

Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare

Director of Health

Chief Executive, Hospital Authority

End

### Immigration status of British citizens

\* \* \* \* \*

The Government announced today (Thursday) that administrative changes to bring the immigration status of British citizens in line with that of other foreign nationals will be implemented from April 1 ahead of the legislative package.

Under the new administrative measures, British citizens may visit Hong Kong visa-free for up to six months. Previously British citizens entering Hong Kong as visitors or for employment, investment, study or otherwise for settlement, were allowed to land and remain in Hong Kong for 12 months without being subject to any other condition of stay.

In addition, if British citizens want to work, study or settle in Hong Kong, they will have to obtain a visa in the same way as other foreign nationals, and the same criteria for approval will apply.

An Immigration Department spokesman said that it was the Government's intention to remove other rights enjoyed exclusively by British citizens in the Immigration Ordinance. This would be a separate exercise, requiring legislation.

"These include the right to land and the special deportation and removal arrangements. The proposed changes will be implemented as soon as the Bill is enacted," he said.

He explained further that by implementing the administrative measures first and deferring the legislative amendments which involved the right to land question until a later stage when the right of abode arrangements become clearer should be a move that would cause less confusion to the British citizens.

As some British citizens may already have made firm arrangements for travel to Hong Kong before the announcement of the new rules, those arriving to work, study or settle in Hong Kong will be granted a period of stay of six months as visitors, during which time they will be able to apply for a change of status.

British citizens who have resided in Hong Kong for seven years and acquired the right to land can continue to enter and remain in Hong Kong without any restrictions as at present.

In order to avoid disruption to British citizens already in Hong Kong, the following transitional arrangement will be implemented :

- \* British citizens who have not yet completed seven years of residence in Hong Kong but have a valid limit of stay can continue to work, study or live in Hong Kong until their current limit of stay expires. There is no need for them to apply for a visa in the meantime.

If they wish to continue to stay in Hong Kong, they will have to apply for extension of stay within four weeks prior to the expiry of their limit of stay. Their applications will then be assessed in accordance with the same immigration policy applicable to other foreign nationals.

Applications for visas to work, study or settle in Hong Kong may be submitted by post directly to the British Citizens Unit, Immigration Department, Immigration Tower, 7 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong by the applicants themselves, or through their sponsors in Hong Kong.

Revised information pamphlets on these changes can be obtained from the Immigration Department from April 1. Enquiries can also be made by telephone to the Department's hotline (tel no. 2824 4055) or fax to 2598 8388, or through E-mail at roa@immd.gcn.gov.hk.

End

#### Monetary statistics for February 1997

\* \* \* \* \*

According to statistics published today (Thursday, 27 March) by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, both deposits and loans and advances increased during February 1997. Table 1 summarizes figures for February 1997 and comparisons with earlier months.

#### Deposits

Total deposits rose by 2.8% in February, following an increase of 1.4% in January. Both HK\$ and foreign currency deposits grew at a faster pace than in the previous month, rising by 3.6% and 1.7% respectively.

The growth of HK\$ deposits was entirely attributable to the marked rise in time deposits, which more than offset the fall in demand and savings deposits. Time deposits surged by 6.7% in February, having risen by 2.4% in January. In contrast, demand deposits fell significantly by 7.7% in February, reversing a 11.4% growth in the previous month, and savings deposits declined slightly by 0.1%, following a 1.2% fall in January. The strong growth in time deposits was partly contributed by placements of share subscription monies in the form of time deposits before the refund dates, while the decline of demand deposits reflected a reversal of previous month's seasonal rise in transaction demand for money after the Chinese New Year holidays.

Both US\$ and non-US\$ deposits increased in February. US\$ deposits grew slightly by 0.3% during the month, after dropping by 2.7% in December 1996 and 0.3% in January 1997, while non-US\$ foreign currency deposits rose further by 3.2%, following increases of 0.5% and 0.9% in December 1996 and January 1997 respectively.

#### Loans and Advances

Total loans and advances continued to expand. They grew by 2.6% in February, following a 0.1% rise in January. Domestic credit expanded by 4.7%, with the 0.9% contraction in loans for trade financing more than offset by a 5.3% increase in other loans for use in Hong Kong. The latter was largely attributable to the rapid rise of loans for share subscriptions and property-related lending. The result of the February 1997 Residential Mortgage Survey of 33 authorized institutions revealed that outstanding residential mortgage loans grew by 2.7% during the month. Offshore loans rebounded slightly by 0.7% in February, from a 3.1% decline in January.

HK\$ and foreign currency loans rose by 5.7% and 0.7% respectively during the month. As HK\$ loans expanded at a faster pace than HK\$ deposits, the HK\$ loan-to-deposit ratio rose further to 108.2% at end-February, from 106.1% at end-January.

#### Money Supply

HK\$M1 fell by 5.9% in February, with currency held by the public falling by 3% and HK\$ demand deposits dropping by 7.7%, as the transaction demand for money eased to a more normal level after the Chinese New Year holidays. In line with the rapid domestic credit expansion, HK\$M2 and HK\$M3 increased by 3.2% and 3.1% respectively in February, following rises of 2.7% and 2.6% in the previous month. In the twelve months to February 1997, HK\$M1 rose by 13.6%, HK\$M2 increased by 22.6% and HK\$M3 grew by 22.3%.

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TABLE 1 : MONETARY STATISTICS - Feb 1997

	(HK\$mn)			
	Feb 1997	Earlier months (% change to Feb 1997)		
		Jan 1997	Nov 1996	Feb 1996
<b>Money Supply</b>				
M1 - HK\$	208,075	221,087 ( -5.9 )	187,289 ( 11.1 )	183,223 ( 13.6 )
Foreign currency	19,753	18,150 ( 8.8 )	19,945 ( -1.0 )	20,240 ( -2.4 )
Total	227,828	239,237 ( -4.8 )	207,235 ( 9.9 )	203,463 ( 12.0 )
M2 - HK\$@	1,593,462	1,543,467 ( 3.2 )	1,514,450 ( 5.2 )	1,299,565 ( 22.6 )
Foreign currency*	1,021,894	1,004,813 ( 1.7 )	1,015,240 ( 0.7 )	1,014,615 ( 0.7 )
Total	2,615,356	2,548,280 ( 2.6 )	2,529,690 ( 3.4 )	2,314,180 ( 13.0 )
M3 - HK\$@	1,609,047	1,560,022 ( 3.1 )	1,531,238 ( 5.1 )	1,315,340 ( 22.3 )
Foreign currency*	1,087,734	1,069,364 ( 1.7 )	1,079,444 ( 0.8 )	1,074,939 ( 1.2 )
Total	2,696,781	2,629,386 ( 2.6 )	2,610,683 ( 3.3 )	2,390,279 ( 12.8 )
Notes and coins in circulation	93,427	99,501 ( -6.1 )	84,176 ( 11.0 )	90,248 ( 3.5 )
of which held by public	82,836	85,430 ( -3.0 )	74,816 ( 10.7 )	80,279 ( 3.2 )
<b>Total Deposits</b>				
Total Demand deposits	144,992	153,807 ( -5.7 )	132,419 ( 9.5 )	123,184 ( 17.7 )
Total Savings deposits	517,482	516,864 ( 0.1 )	505,110 ( 2.4 )	456,340 ( 13.4 )
Total Time deposits	1,874,782	1,796,665 ( 4.3 )	1,822,139 ( 2.9 )	1,663,279 ( 12.7 )
With licensed banks	1,815,196	1,736,829 ( 4.5 )	1,763,464 ( 2.9 )	1,609,445 ( 12.8 )
With restricted licence banks	44,161	44,604 ( -1.0 )	42,888 ( 3.0 )	36,647 ( 20.5 )
With deposit-taking companies	15,425	15,232 ( 1.3 )	15,787 ( -2.3 )	17,187 ( -10.3 )
HK\$ deposits@	1,482,914	1,431,081 ( 3.6 )	1,414,677 ( 4.8 )	1,197,707 ( 23.8 )
Demand deposits	125,240	135,656 ( -7.7 )	112,473 ( 11.4 )	102,944 ( 21.7 )
Savings deposits	361,485	361,714 ( -0.1 )	357,293 ( 1.2 )	316,882 ( 14.1 )
Time deposits@	996,189	933,711 ( 6.7 )	944,911 ( 5.4 )	777,881 ( 28.1 )
US\$ deposits*	516,780	515,408 ( 0.3 )	531,373 ( -2.7 )	524,308 ( -1.4 )
Other foreign currency deposits*	537,563	520,847 ( 3.2 )	513,617 ( 4.7 )	520,789 ( 3.2 )
Foreign currency deposits*	1,054,343	1,036,254 ( 1.7 )	1,044,990 ( 0.9 )	1,045,096 ( 0.9 )
All deposits	2,537,257	2,467,336 ( 2.8 )	2,459,667 ( 3.2 )	2,242,803 ( 13.1 )
Foreign currency swap deposits	36,786	37,899 ( -2.9 )	39,043 ( -5.8 )	46,423 ( -20.8 )
<b>Total Loans and advances</b>				
Loans for use in H.K.	1,978,177	1,889,694 ( 4.7 )	1,829,423 ( 8.1 )	1,614,395 ( 22.5 )
To finance H.K.'s visible trade	162,598	164,509 ( -1.2 )	164,088 ( -0.9 )	158,037 ( 2.9 )
To finance merchandising trade not touching H.K.	21,409	21,120 ( 1.4 )	19,017 ( 12.6 )	19,508 ( 9.7 )
Other loans for use in H.K.	1,794,170	1,704,065 ( 5.3 )	1,646,318 ( 9.0 )	1,436,850 ( 24.9 )
Loans for use outside H.K.#	2,042,780	2,027,949 ( 0.7 )	2,090,142 ( -2.3 )	2,144,967 ( -4.8 )
Other loans for use outside H.K.	2,000,601	1,987,673 ( 0.7 )	2,049,288 ( -2.4 )	2,105,539 ( -5.0 )
Other loans where the place of use is not known	42,178	40,276 ( 4.7 )	40,854 ( 3.2 )	39,428 ( 7.0 )
Loans in HK\$	1,604,565	1,518,017 ( 5.7 )	1,460,511 ( 9.9 )	1,273,096 ( 26.0 )
Loans in foreign currencies	2,416,391	2,399,626 ( 0.7 )	2,459,054 ( -1.7 )	2,486,266 ( -2.8 )
Total loans and advances	4,020,957	3,917,644 ( 2.6 )	3,919,565 ( 2.6 )	3,759,361 ( 7.0 )

\* Adjusted to exclude foreign currency swap deposits.

@ Adjusted to include foreign currency swap deposits.

# Including those where place of usage is unknown.

Note : Data may not add up to total due to rounding.

End

### Government to tighten vehicle emission standards

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The Air Pollution Control (Vehicle Design Standards) (Emission)(Amendment) Regulations 1996 will come into effect on April 1 (Tuesday).

The amended Regulation will require all newly-registered diesel vehicles over four tonnes to comply with a set of new emission standards.

To tie in with the new standards, a cleaner auto diesel will, on the same day, be introduced under the Air Pollution Control (Motor Vehicle Fuel) (Amendment) Regulation 1996.

The sulphur content of the new auto diesel will be reduced from the current level of 0.2% further down to a very low level of 0.05%.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Protection, Mr Tse Chin-wan, said the amended regulations were part of the Government's effort to fight against air pollution from motor vehicles.

"Diesel vehicles complying with the new standards and using the new diesel fuel will emit 60 percent less particulate matters and 12 percent less nitrogen oxides than those complying with the current standards," he said.

Mr Tse pointed out that the Government's policy was to adopt the most stringent vehicle emission standards and auto fuel standards once they became practical.

"To be in line with the emission standards to be introduced in the European Union, the Government is now planning to tighten the emission standards for diesel vehicles weighing four tonnes and below in April 1998," he said.

"Besides, the Government is also exploring further measures to control the air pollution from diesel vehicles," Mr Tse added.

End

### Phasing out noisy hammers in four stages

\* \* \* \* \*

The Governor-in-Council has approved that legislative amendment be made to impose more stringent noise criteria on the noisy percussive hammers.

The Noise Control (Amendment) Bill 1997, gazetted today (Thursday), seeks to reduce noise level generated from percussive piling by phasing out the use of three types of noisy hammers -- diesel, pneumatic and steam -- in built-up areas and replace them with quieter alternatives such as the hydraulic ones.

A spokesman for the Planning, Environment and Lands Branch said that percussive piling generates significant noise impact on its neighbourhood. Three types of hammers, namely diesel, pneumatic and steam hammers are the noisiest, of which diesel hammer accounts for over 80% of piling permits issued and produce noise levels up to 103 dB(A) at 10 metres. Pneumatic and steam hammer also produces noise level up to 106 dB(A) at 10 metres.

By comparison, hydraulic hammer is more environmentally friendly as it produces about two to nine dB(A) quieter than diesel, pneumatic and steam hammers under the same site conditions and will not emit filthy smoke. Moreover, mitigation measures such as acoustic shrouds may be applied to achieve further noise reduction.

In collaboration with government departments, the Hong Kong Construction Association has completed a series of piling tests which found that hydraulic hammers can achieve the required hammer efficiency. The results of the piling tests have been accepted by the Building Authority.

"To moderate the impact on the construction industry and to allow time for suppliers of hydraulic hammers to meet the demand, we propose to phase out noisy hammers in four stages at six-month intervals commencing in early 1998. Progressively, the noise criteria for issuing construction noise permits to percussive piling operations using those hammers will be tightened," the spokesman said.

During the final stage at around year 2000 the use of noisy hammers in built-up areas will practically be banned. Nonetheless, they can still be used in remote areas where they will not disturb anyone.

"From July 1, 1997, the Administration will take the lead in promoting the use of hydraulic hammers in public works and housing projects in advance of legislative controls," he added.

The construction industry and related professional organisation were consulted on the proposed control.

The Bill, which was endorsed by the Advisory Council on the Environment, will be introduced into the Legislative Council on April 9.

End

#### Amendment Rules under Probate & Administration Ordinance

\*\*\*\*\*

The Non-Contentious Probate (Amendment) Rules 1997 and Official Administrator's Accounts (Interest) (Amendment) Rules 1997 were gazetted today (Thursday).

"The Amendment Rules were made consequent upon an amendment to Section 15(1) of the Probate and Administration Ordinance by Legislative Councillor Bruce Liu Sing-lee. The amendment was passed by the Legislative Council last year, raising the ceiling on the size of the estates eligible for summary administration from \$50,000 to \$150,000," a Government spokesman said.

The spokesman said that Section 15(1) of the Ordinance provides that the Registrar of the Supreme Court, in his capacity as Official Administrator, may summarily administer small estates of a value not exceeding \$150,000.

"This alleviates the need to engage a solicitor in the proceedings and the financial burden of undertaking a formal administration of such estates," he added.

The Non-Contentious Probate (Amendment) Rules 1997 raised the ceiling on the size of an estate which a personal applicant can request the Official Administrator to deal with from \$50,000 to \$150,000.

Similarly, the Official Administrator's Accounts (Interest) (Amendment) Rules 1997 raised the ceiling not exceeding which the moneys belonging to the estate administered will not be credited interest from \$50,000 to \$150,000.

End

### Six Queen's Counsel appointed

\* \* \* \* \*

The Acting Chief Justice, the Hon Mr Justice Nazareth, is pleased to announce the appointment of Mr Ching Y. Wong, Mr Raymond Faulkner, Miss Alice Mok, Mr Philip J. Dykes, Mr Gerard McCoy and Mr D.G. Saw as Her Majesty's Counsel for Hong Kong.

A ceremony, to be presided by the Acting Chief Justice, will be held in No. 1 court of the Supreme Court at 10 am on May 10 (Saturday) to call within the Bar the six new Queen's Counsel.

The biographical notes of the newly-appointed Queen's Counsels are as follows:

#### Mr Ching Y. Wong

Mr Ching Y. Wong, aged 48, was called to the Bar in the United Kingdom in 1972 and admitted to the Hong Kong Bar in 1975. He specialises in criminal law. Mr Wong was a member of the Bar Council between 1991 and 1993 and was Chairman of the Bar Association's Special Committee on Criminal Law and Practice in 1991 and 1992. He was also Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee on Discipline in 1992 and 1993. He has been a member of the Barristers' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel since 1995.

#### Mr Raymond Faulkner

Mr Raymond Faulkner, aged 49, was called to the Bar in the United Kingdom in 1970 and admitted to the Hong Kong Bar in 1976. He specialises in commercial law, including company, shipping, banking and contracts of sale. Mr Faulkner was a co-opted member of the Bar Council in 1984 and 1985 and sat as a member of the Bar Association's Special Committee on Discipline in 1996. He has been a member of the Bar Association's Special Committee on Overseas Admission and the Joint Committee with Law Society on Counsel's Fees since 1992.

#### Miss Alice Mok

Miss Alice Mok, aged 42, was called to the Bar in the United Kingdom in 1977 and admitted to the Hong Kong Bar in the same year. Her practice is mainly concerned with family, insurance and personal injury litigation. She has served in the Registration of Persons Tribunal since 1987, the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Boards since 1991, the Barristers' Disciplinary Tribunal Panel since 1993, the Bar Association's Special Committee on Overseas Admission since 1994 and the Town Planning Appeal Board since 1995. She is presently Chairman of the Bar Association's Special Committee on Personnel Injuries.

Mr Philip J. Dykes

Mr Philip J. Dykes, aged 43, was called to the Bar in the United Kingdom in 1977 and admitted to the Hong Kong Bar in 1985. He joined the Attorney General's Chambers in the same year. Since leaving the Attorney General's Chambers in 1991, he has been in practice in Hong Kong, specialising in public law. Mr Dykes was a member of the Bar Council from 1995 to 1997. He has served on several Bar's special committees including the Special Committee on Criminal Law and Special Committee on Human Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

Mr Gerard McCoy

Mr Gerard McCoy, aged 40, was called to the New Zealand Bar in 1980, the United Kingdom Bar in 1986 and admitted to the Hong Kong Bar in 1987. He joined the Attorney General's Chambers in 1984. Since leaving the Attorney General's Chambers in 1987, he has had an extensive appellate and advisory practice involving criminal, international and administrative law.

Mr D. G. Saw

Mr D. G. Saw, aged 48, was admitted to practise as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria and the High Court of Australia in 1972. He signed the roll of counsel of the Victorian Bar in 1973. He joined the Attorney General's Chambers in 1987 and has been specialising in criminal law. Since 1990, he has specialised in appeal cases heard in the High Court, the Court of Criminal Appeal and the Privy Council. Mr Saw is now a Senior Assistant Crown Prosecutor and the Head of the Criminal Appeals Section of the Prosecutions Division.

End

Firm guidance document issued for consultation

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The Education Department today (Thursday) issued a document containing proposals for firm guidance on medium of instruction (MOI) to secondary schools for two months' consultation with school sponsoring bodies, school councils, schools and teacher associations.

Firm guidance will be issued in November 1997 making Chinese the basic medium of instruction for local public sector secondary schools, starting with Secondary 1 in September 1998.

These schools should progressively adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction unless they have the Director of Education's prior approval to teach in English.

Only schools with evidence of suitable student ability and teacher capability may apply to the Director of Education for special approval to use English as their teaching medium.

An individual school will not be allowed to operate both Chinese-medium and English-medium classes.

In applying for teaching in English, a school should satisfy the Education Department that it has, for the past three years, an average of 85 per cent Medium of Instruction Grouping Assessment (MIGA) Groups I and III students in its S1 intake.

The Secondary School Places Allocation System will remain unchanged.

The Director of Education, Mrs Helen C P Lai Yu, said: "Since 1986, it has been Government policy to persuade schools to adopt Chinese as their medium of instruction. This is because the mother tongue is recognised worldwide as the most effective medium of instruction. Government's policy was endorsed by the Education Commission in its report No. 4 in 1990.

"In 1996, the Education Commission in its Report No. 6 further recommended that the Education Department should publish its advice in 1997 for adoption by schools in 1998. These Education Commission reports have been the subject of extensive public consultation on each occasion.

"Our firm guidance aims also to eliminate the situation in which schools claim that they adopt one medium of instruction but practise another."

The Education Department will intensify inspections of schools given approval to teach in English.

Schools which fail to observe the firm guidance will face sanctions, as suggested in ECR6.

The Education Department has over the years adopted a series of measures to support schools teaching in Chinese. These include additional teachers of English; additional wirefree induction loop system to enhance teaching through listening; and library grant for additional reading materials and other English teaching aids.

In addition, training courses are organised to prepare teachers to teach in Chinese. There was also a Chinese Textbooks Incentive Award Scheme to encourage publishers to produce good quality Chinese textbooks and an English-Chinese glossary of terms to assist teachers to teach in Chinese.

An Intensive English Language Programme is being conducted for S6 and S7 students who have studied through the Chinese medium to assist them to achieve the standard of English required for admission to tertiary institutions.

Mrs Yu emphasised: "Our proposals aim to help our students learn better. Learning of the English language in schools remains a Government priority."

"We will continue to work together with schools and other relevant bodies to enhance the English language proficiency of our students. As a matter of fact, ECR6 has also provided a comprehensive strategy for enhancing language proficiency," she added.

Views and comments should be sent to the Assistant Director of Education (Planning and Research) at Room 1116, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, before June 1, 1997.

End

#### SCOLAR invites applications to the Language Fund

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The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) announced that applications to the Language Fund from organisations or individuals to initiate and undertake projects or activities to improve language proficiency could be made between April 1 and June 30.

Speaking to the media after a meeting of the Committee, the Committee Chairman, Dr Daniel Tse Chi-wai, said today (Thursday): "This is the fifth call for applications since the Fund was set up in March 1994. In the past four funding allocation exercises, the Fund has supported a total of 110 projects awarding grants of over \$140 million."

"Pursuant to the Committee's pro-active approach, members decided that priority should be given to primary language education including pre-school education in vetting this round of applications," Dr Tse said.

The meeting also decided on a list of research titles for applications to undertake research projects to address issues raised in the Education Commission Report No. 6.

"The first batch of research projects to be commissioned by SCOLAR will focus on four areas of language education, namely, primary language acquisition, the relationship between Putonghua and the Chinese language subject, students' ability to study in English at the tertiary level, and the use of multi-media technology in language learning," Dr Tse said.

"These research projects will explore patterns of learning Chinese and English of our primary students, the role of multi-media technology in language learning, and the English required for academic study," Dr Tse added.

Based on the findings of these research projects, SCOLAR will be better placed to advise the Government on the future direction of language in education policy.

All applications to the Language Fund should be addressed to the SCOLAR Support Unit, Room 603, Central Government Offices (West Wing), 11 Ice House Street, Central. (Tel 2810 2296 or 2810 2850, Fax 2801 7490).

Application forms are also obtainable in person at the above address or the General Enquiry, Education Department, 15th Floor, Wu Chung House, 213 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai.

Applicants may also download the application forms and the list of research titles from the web sites: Education and Manpower Branch (<http://www.info.gov.hk/emb/>) or Education Department (<http://www.info.gov.hk/ed/>).

SCOLAR has also decided to stage an exhibition on May 31 and June 1 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre to disseminate the result of past Language Fund projects.

The exhibition will provide an opportunity for students, teachers, educators, parents and the wider public to appreciate and share the achievements of the Language Fund.

"The public will be able to experience first-hand innovative ways of learning languages through our board displays, seminars and hands-on experience corners.

"We hope the exhibition will allow the public to share the fruits of Language Fund projects and raise their awareness of the importance of language proficiency," Dr Tse said.

End

Services Support Fund: Invitation for applications

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The Industry Department is now inviting the second batch of applications for funding support under the Services Support Fund (SSF). The deadline for applications is May 23, 1997.

The Fund, administered by the Industry Department, is set up to provide financial support for projects which can contribute to the overall development and the competitiveness of Hong Kong's service sectors. The first batch of applications had been invited last year and 14 projects were approved for funding support.

Projects to be funded should be non-profit making in nature, except for the purpose of the project's long-term self-sufficiency.

Four main types of organisations are eligible to apply for the SSF. They are services-support bodies, trade and industry associations, higher education institutions, and professional bodies and research institutes. Locally incorporated companies may also be considered if their projects will benefit the service industry that go beyond the interests of individual enterprises.

Recipient organisations will be required to disseminate the project results to the relevant service sectors.

Funding support is normally given as a grant. In special cases, it may also take the form of an interest-free or interest-bearing loan.

The Director-General of Industry will approve projects on the recommendations of the SSF Vetting Committee, the advisory body set up to advise on the administration of the Fund.

Interested organisations are urged to send in applications to the Industry Department as soon as possible. Application forms and information leaflets introducing the SSF can be obtained from the Services Support Fund Secretariat, Room 1445, 14/F, Ocean Centre, 5 Canton Road, Kowloon. No application fees will be charged.

Enquiries can be made by telephone on 2736 0055/2737 2278 or by fax to 2377 0730.

End

### Four military reprovisioning projects completed

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The Secretary for Works, Mr Kwong Hon-sang, today (Thursday) congratulated a number of Government departments for the smooth and punctual completion of four military reprovisioning projects amidst a tight schedule.

Mr Kwong also thanked the Chinese side for their co-operation in providing information on the operation and management requirements of these facilities.

The four facilities are the Military Storage Facilities at Shek Kong Camp, Joint Movement Unit at Chek Lap Kok Airport, Military Hospital at Gun Club Hill Barracks and Naval Base on Stonecutters Island.

Speaking at the completion ceremony for these projects, Mr Kwong recalled that the Architectural Services Department, together with the Civil Engineering Department and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, had had only three years to achieve the mission since the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group reached an agreement on the use of military sites on June 30, 1994.

"Within these three years, a lot of work had to be done, including application for fund allocation, detailed design, tender invitation, construction, inspection, etc," he said.

He also noted that the Director of Architectural Services, Mr Kenneth Chan, had led an engineering team to brief Chinese experts on the design concept and details through a series of meetings.

"The fruit of the hard work is here for all to see," the Secretary said, adding that he, too, felt proud of the achievement.

Mr Chan also spoke at the ceremony, which he described as "the grandest and of the largest scale in the Architectural Services Department's history."

He said the four projects were "complex and important military works."

Mr Chan joined the Secretary for Works in paying tribute to staff of the three departments for "giving up a lot of family life" to meet the heavy workload.

"I also feel proud of their serious attitude, pool efforts, energy and confidence which together contributed to the successful completion of these projects," he said.

He also thanked experts from the Chinese side for their sincere attitude, pragmatic spirit and positiveness in solving problems during the construction.

End

Marine access in Siu A Chau

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The Governor-in-Council has authorized to carry out reclamation within an area of about 1.57 hectares of foreshore and seabed at Sum Wan in Siu A Chau.

The reclamation is to provide a marine access to the Low-level Radioactive Waste Storage Facility (LRWF) which will be located on the western side of Sum Wan.

The reclamation comprises dredging of seabed and construction of seawalls, piers and slipways. The main permanent structure will be a three-metre wide and 85-metre long pier equipped with a lifting davit, navigation lighting and fire-fighting equipment.

An Environmental Impact and Safety Assessment (EISA) study on the proposed LRWF has been undertaken and concluded that any ecological impact of the LRWF would be localized and that the liquid and gaseous discharges, if any, would meet the established standards and dose limits for the public in terms of radiological impact.

Detailed operation procedures, environmental monitoring and audit programmes will be established prior to actual operations in accordance with the EISA recommendations.

In addition, both on-site and off-site environmental radiation levels in the vicinity will be continuously monitored.

The extent of the area affected is described in a notice of authorization published in the Government Gazette today (Thursday).

Any person who considers that his interest, right or easement in or over the foreshore and seabed involved will be injuriously affected by the work may deliver to the Director of Lands a written claim for compensation before March 27, 1998.

The notice together with its related plan No. ISM 958 can be seen at the Lands Department's Survey and Mapping Office, 14th floor, Murray Building, Garden Road, Hong Kong (where copies can be purchased on order) and at the Islands District Office, 20th floor, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong.

End

Ma On Shan new post office

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The Ma On Shan Post Office, a new branch post office located at Unit 2, ground floor, Sunshine City Phase 4, 18 On Luk Street, Ma On Shan, Sha Tin, New Territories, opened for business at noon today (Thursday).

This post office provides a normal range of counter services to the Ma On Shan Town Centre as well as postal delivery service to the whole Ma On Shan area. There are 500 post office boxes in the new post office. The business hours of the post office are:-

Monday to Friday:	9.30 am to 5 pm
Saturday:	9.30 am to 1 pm

The hours of access for the post office boxes are:-

Monday to Saturday:	8 am to 7 pm
Sunday:	1 pm to 7 pm

The telephone number is: 2633 3543

The Postmaster General, Mr Robert Footman, the Chairman of Sha Tin District Board, Mr Choy Kan-pui and the District Officer (Sha Tin), Miss WONG Mei-lin, officiated at the opening ceremony this morning.

The total number of branch post offices in Hong Kong at present is 126.

Replacement of the Post Office datestamps with bilingual indications for this new Ma On Shan Post Office will take place in the same phase for Sha Tin and Ma On Shan area on April 24, 1997 (Thursday). Hand back service will be provided to privately made covers bearing indication of 'Last Day Cover' on the day preceding the changeover and 'First Day Cover' on the day the new datestamps come into use.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority Tender Results

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Tender date	:	27 March 1997
Paper on offer	:	EF Bills
Issue number	:	Q075
Issue date	:	1 April 1997
Maturity date	:	30 April 1997
Amount applied	:	HK\$14,850 MN
Amount allotted	:	HK\$5,000 MN
Average yield accepted	:	5.17 PCT
Highest yield accepted	:	5.18 PCT
Pro rata ratio	:	About 32 PCT
Average tender yield	:	5.20 PCT

End

Firing practice in April

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Firing practice by the British Forces will take place at the Ha Tsuen/Castle Peak Range on 14 days next month (April). Members of the public are advised not to enter the area when red flags are hoisted.

Following are the dates and times for the firing practice:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>
April 8 (Tuesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 9 (Wednesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 10 (Thursday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 11 (Friday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 14 (Monday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 15 (Tuesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 16 (Wednesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 17 (Thursday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 18 (Friday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 21 (Monday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 22 (Tuesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 23 (Wednesday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 24 (Thursday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm
April 25 (Friday)	8.30 am - 11.59 pm

End