DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Death of elderly persons during cold weather

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Responding to concerns about reported deaths of elderly people during the recent cold weather, a government spokesman said today (Monday) that the Administration had always placed a high priority on improving services for the elderly and on promoting community care for them.

The spokesman said the Government would examine whether improvements could be made to the existing arrangements for dealing with prolonged cold weather. At the same time, he appealed to families and the community to look after their elderly relatives and neighbours during cold weather.

"The sick and the elderly are more vulnerable to sudden changes in temperature," he said.

The Director of Health, Dr Margaret Chan, has, nevertheless, confirmed that none of the post-mortems conducted over the past 10 days had shown hypothermia to be the cause of death of the persons involved.

The spokesman noted that the number of deaths that had occurred over the last 10 days was comparable to the average number of deaths during the winter of previous years.

"During the cold spell, the Home Affairs Department opened in each district a temporary shelter providing hot drinking water, hot meals and now mattresses for sleeping on," said the spokesman.

"But we cannot force street sleepers into the shelters; we can only persuade and encourage them," he added.

Government staff have actively been meeting street sleepers to persuade them to go into shelters and to pass them blankets to keep them warm. For the last two evenings, street sleepers have been offered transport to take them to the shelters.

"The real challenge has been to provide care to elderly persons living alone," he said.

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has mobilised a wide range of resources to reach out to these people during this period.

Social workers in Family Service Centres have been instructed to check the needs of their elderly clients; Social Security Field Units have also been checking up on their single elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients.

SWD's district staff have been contacting non-governmental organisations running local multi-service centres for the elderly and home help teams to check up on any elderly clients who might be particularly vulnerable.

The home help teams which have worked throughout the holiday period making 670 visits to clients needing their services have been a particularly useful outreaching service.

"But there are more than 80,000 elderly persons living alone in Hong Kong. There is a limitation to what the Government can do in providing personal care to each of them," said the spokesman.

The Government must take the lead in meeting the needs of those most vulnerable in the community but it could not possibly hope to fulfil a role more properly met by basic neighbourliness and family values, he said.

The spokesman added that the Government had placed a very high priority on improving services for the elderly.

"This year we will have spent $9 billion on health, welfare and social security services for them - a 50 per cent increase in real terms over three years," he said.

But for elderly living alone the main answer was old-fashioned community spirit, the spokesman added.

The Secretary for Health and Welfare is drawing up plans with the Directors of Home Affairs and Social Welfare to further promote the need for everyone to show more care for the elderly in the community.

No matter how much resources were devoted to services for the elderly, in the final analysis, the Government could not replace the family in providing support for elderly persons living at home, said the spokesman.

End

Provisional statistics of retail sales for 1995

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According to the provisional figures released today (Monday) by the Census and Statistics Department, the value of total retail sales in December 1995, estimated at $20.3 billion, increased by 4% when compared with December 1994.

After discounting the effect of price changes over the period, total retail sales dropped by 1% in volume in December 1995.

For the year of 1995 as a whole, total retail sales rose by 5% in value but dropped by 1% in volume when compared with 1994. Compared to the respective increases of 12% in value and 6% in volume in 1994, this reflected a general slackening in consumer spending in 1995.

In December 1995, sales of motor vehicles continued to show a significant decline compared with a year earlier, by 47% in value and 50% in volume. Sales of other consumer durable goods, although having virtually no change in value, also recorded a decrease of 4% in volume.

Meanwhile, sales in supermarkets rose by 6% in value but dropped by 3% in volume. Sales of jewellery, watches and clocks and valuable gifts and those of fuels showed growth of 2% and 1% respectively in value, but respective decreases of 2% and 5% in volume.

Nevertheless, sales of clothing and footwear continued to increase notably, by 16% in value and 9% in volume. Increases were also registered for sales of miscellaneous consumer goods (13% in value and 8% in volume) and food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (7% in value and 5% in volume). Concurrently, sales in department stores increased by 7% in value and 1% in volume.

Compared with November 1995, but bearing in mind that this comparison is affected by seasonal factors, total retail sales in December 1995 increased by 19% in value and 20% in volume.

For the year of 1995 as a whole, there was a slight decline in volume of total retail sales. This was however mainly attributable to the considerable drop in sales of motor vehicles, which fell by 29% in value and 35% in volume when compared with 1994.

Meanwhile, sales in supermarkets showed an increase of 8% in value and virtually no change in volume. Sales in department stores also recorded an increase of 4% in value, despite a decrease of 4% in volume.

Furthermore, sales of fuels and food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco increased by 5% and 4% in value respectively. In volume terms, they decreased both by 2%.

On the other hand, increases were still recorded for sales of miscellaneous consumer goods (14% in value and 9% in volume); clothing and footwear (14% in value and 4% in volume); as well as jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts (6% in value and 4% in volume).

The volume of retail sales is derived from the value of retail sales after adjusting for price changes. The relevant components of the Consumer Price Index are used as deflators.

Table 1 presents the revised total retail sales figure for November 1995 and the provisional figure for December 1995.

Table 2 shows the value and volume indices of retail sales in December 1994, November and December 1995 for all retail outlets and by type of retail outlet, with average retail sales from October 1989 to September 1990 taken as 100. Comparisons of the December 1995 results with those for November 1995 and those for December 1994, as well as comparisons of retail sales in the period from January to December 1995 with the same period in 1994 are also given.

The report containing the analysis of the December 1995 results is now on sale at $4 per copy at the Government Publications Centre, Queensway Government Offices, ground floor, Low Block, 66 Queensway; and the Publications Unit of the Census and Statistics Department, 19th floor, Wanchai Tower, 12 Harbour Road, Wan Chai.

Enquiries about the survey results may be directed to the Wholesale and Retail Trade Statistics Section of the Census and Statistics Department, Tel 2802 1258.

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TABLE 1 : TOTAL RETAIL SALES

Total Retail Sales for December 1995 (Provisional Figure) = HK$20,320.2 million

for November 1995 (Revised Figure) = HK$17,129.6 million

TABLE 2 : VALUE AND VOLUME INDICES OF RETAIL SALES FOR DECEMBER 1994, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1995

(Monthly average of Oct 89 - Sept 90 = 100)

Type of Outlet	Type of Index	Index Number			% Change		
		December 1994 (Revised figures)	November 1995 (Revised figures)	December 1995 (Provisional figures)	Dec 1995 compared with Nov 1995	Dec 1995 compared with Dec 1994	Jan - Dec 1995 compared with Jan - Dec 1994
		(Point)	(Point)	(Point)	(%)	(%)	(%)
(A) FOR ALL RETAIL OUTLETS	Value	208.8	182.4	216.4	+18.6	+3.6	+4.7
	Volume	159.1	131.2	157.0	+19.6	-1.4	-1.3
(B) BY TYPE OF RETAIL OUTLETS							
Food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (other than supermarkets)	Value	142.6	140.0	152.2	+8.7	+6.7	+4.3
	Volume	104.3	100.0	109.4	+9.4	+4.9	-2.3
Supermarkets ϕ	Value	171.5	154.0	181.1	+17.5	+5.6	+7.6
	Volume	119.3	98.8	116.1	+17.5	-2.7	-0.4
Fuels	Value	158.1	141.0	159.0	+12.8	+0.6	+4.6
	Volume	108.8	91.2	103.1	+13.1	-5.3	-2.3
Clothing, footwear and allied products	Value	321.2	314.8	371.1	+17.9	+15.5	+13.9
	Volume	210.3	188.7	229.1	+21.4	+8.9	+4.0
Consumer durable goods	Value	202.7	154.0	165.2	+7.2	-18.5	-12.6
	Volume	165.6	122.2	134.0	+9.7	-19.1	-15.5
- Motor vehicles and parts	Value	190.6	125.7	101.7	-19.1	-46.6	-29.4
	Volume	132.7	82.9	66.7	-19.5	-49.8	-35.0
- Consumer durable goods other than motor vehicles and parts	Value	211.4	174.5	211.1	+20.9	-0.1	-0.1
	Volume	189.4	150.6	182.8	+21.4	-3.5	-3.9
Department stores	Value	210.2	153.9	224.2	+45.6	+6.6	+4.4
	Volume	145.3	98.2	147.1	+49.7	+1.3	-3.8
Jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts	Value	206.0	177.1	210.4	+18.8	+2.1	+5.9
	Volume	196.5	162.8	192.1	+18.0	-2.3	+3.6
Other consumer goods not elsewhere classified	Value	235.7	227.1	266.7	+17.4	+13.2	+14.0
	Volume	182.1	166.9	197.1	+18.1	+8.2	+8.6

NOTE : ϕ Not including supermarkets operating in department stores.
The underlined figures were rounded up to 5.

End

Consultancy studies on language benchmarks invited

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The Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) is inviting interested parties to express intention to carry out consultancy studies on language benchmarks for teachers in schools as proposed by the Education Commission in its draft Report No 6 on language proficiency.

Announcing this today (Monday), a spokesman for the ACTEQ said the No 6 Report recommended that the proposals should take forward as a matter of priority.

The studies therefore should focus on one or both of the following studies:

(1) Consultancy on benchmarks for teachers using English as the medium of instruction and English language teachers in primary and secondary schools;

(2) Consultancy on benchmarks for teachers using Cantonese as the medium of instruction and Chinese language (including Putonghua) teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Interested parties may write to the Secretary of ACTEQ for details of the studies and a consultancy brief.

Their proposals should be submitted to the Secretariat on or before March 8 (Friday). Consultants should be prepared to present their proposals before an assessment panel if so required.

All correspondence should be sent to:

The Secretary,
Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications
c/o Education and Manpower Branch,
Room 920A, Central Government Offices (West Wing),
Ice House Street, Hong Kong.

In case of enquiries, ACTEQ secretary, Ms Olivia Nip, can be contacted on 2810 3950 or by fax 2537 4591.

End

Further grant from Disaster Relief Fund approved

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The Disaster Relief Fund Advisory Committee has today (Monday) approved a grant of $1.95 million to Medecins Sans Frontieres as a contribution to its emergency relief operation for earthquake victims in Lijiang, Yunnan, China.

This is the third grant for such purpose from the Fund, the first two being a $4.195 million grant to Hong Kong Red Cross and a $3 million grant to Oxfam Hong Kong.

The Government will require Medecins Sans Frontieres to submit an evaluation report and an audited account on the use of the grant to ensure that the money will be used for the designated purpose.

"Medecins Sans Frontieres is already working in the earthquake affected areas. The grant will assist its field operation staff in providing shelter and treatment for the wounded," a government spokesman said.

The Advisory Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary. Other members are Dr Raymond Ch'ien, Mr J D McGregor, Mr Cheung Hon-chung, Mr Lau Chin-shek, the Secretary for Health and Welfare, and the Secretary for the Treasury.

End

Places available at Govt primary schools

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Parents wishing to apply for Primary 2 to 6 school places for their children in government schools in the new academic year commencing this September will be able to do so from this Friday (March 1).

Senior Education Officer (Government Schools), Mrs Fok Yu-hing, said children aged six years and eight months or above on September 1 this year are eligible to apply for admission.

Details of vacancies will be displayed at the main entrance of government primary schools and application forms will be available during working hours from individual schools between March 1 and March 9.

Enquiries should be made direct to individual schools to see if there are vacancies at any level.

Mrs Fok advised parents to return the completed forms of the school of their choice on or before March 9.

Selection of applicants will be made on March 15.

Application forms are free and no entrance fee is charged for any admission to any Government school.

Mrs Fok said, "Children will normally be admitted to schools in the district in which they live. Care will be taken to ensure as far as possible that children from the same family will be studying at the same school."

"To facilitate the process of application, parents should provide all the particulars asked for in the application form," Mrs Fok said.

Meanwhile, parents are reminded that all children in the six to 12 age group who are not in school should apply for admission.

End

Water storage figure

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Storage in Hong Kong's reservoirs at 9 am today (Monday) stood at 79.5 per cent of capacity or 465.925 million cubic metres.

This time last year the reservoirs contained 404.377 million cubic metres of water, representing 69 per cent of capacity.

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority tender results

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Tender date	26 Feb 1996
Paper on offer	EF notes
Issue number	7302
Issue date	27 Feb 1996
Maturity date	27 Feb 2003
Coupon	6.02 PCT
Amount applied	HK$1,930 MN
Amount allotted	HK$500 MN
Average price accepted (yield)	99.77 (6.52 PCT)
Lowest price accepted (yield)	97.75 (6.53 PCT)
Pro rata ratio	About 47 PCT
Average tender price (yield)	97.62 (6.55 PCT)

End

Hong Kong Monetary Authority money market operations

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	$ million	Time (hours)	Cumulative change ($million)
Opening balance in the account	1,956	0930	+846
Closing balance in the account	2,482	1000	+846
Change attributable to :		1100	+846
Money market activity	+826	1200	+826
LAF today	-300	1500	+826
		1600	+826

LAF rate 4.00% bid/6.00% offer TWI 123.1 *-0.1* 26.2.96

Hong Kong Monetary Authority

EF bills		EF notes				
Terms	Yield	Term	Issue	Coupon	Price	Yield
1 week	4.68	2 years	2802	5.16	99.89	5.29
1 month	4.80	3 years	3901	5.57	100.29	5.53
3 months	4.93	5 years	5012	6.38	101.35	6.14
6 months	5.00	7 years	7211	6.82	102.36	6.48
12 months	5.04	5 years	M502	7.30	103.85	6.44

Total turnover of EF bills and notes - $11,223 million

Closed February 26, 1996

End