



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

ISSUED BY GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICES
BEACONSFIELD HOUSE, HONG KONG. TEL.: 2842 8777

SUPPLEMENT

Wednesday, November 22, 1995

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
"Safety net" always available to the unemployed	1
SHW on unemployment assistance scheme	3
Rehabilitation of Offenders Bill	6
Training of local professionals for PAA	8
Female senior staff in UGC-funded institutions	11
Drug abuse among youngsters	15
Conversion of fishing vessels into cargo ships	17
Occupational safety in non-industrial undertakings	18
Piling works at Ma On Shan site	22
Standard for provision of multi-media services	24
Rise in cost of living	25
Prices of private residential properties	26

Living area

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
Living area for Temporary Housing Area tenants	28
Discharged mental patients sharing public housing units	30
Financial Secretary's comments on property prices	31
SAR passports for ethnic minorities	33
Transmission of Hepatitis B	34
Relocation of manufacturing processes to China	35
Measures to boost morale of CSD officers	37
Telephone services provided by government departments	39
Textile and clothing industries	40
Development statement for South East Kowloon	44
Pollutants discharged from dry cleaning	46

"Safety net" always available to the unemployed.

* * * * *

The Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, reiterated that the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) should not be "hijacked" to perform the role of an unemployment benefit scheme - a role that it was never intended to play.

Speaking during the motion debate on unemployment assistance scheme at the Legislative Council today (Wednesday), she said as explained many times before, CSSA provided no more than a "safety net" for those unable to support themselves financially.

"Unemployed persons can and do receive CSSA payments, but they do so only if their income is unable to meet their recognised needs and if the value of their assets does not exceed the permitted limit," she said.

Commenting on the Hon Chan Yuen-han's proposal to enable an unemployed person to become eligible for assistance if he or she had savings below \$116,000, Mrs Fok queried why an unemployed person with such a level of savings should be allowed to receive public financial assistance in the form of an unemployment assistance payment.

Some of the taxpayers in lower paid jobs contributing to that payment may not even have such a high level of savings themselves, she said.

In addition to that \$116,000 of savings, the person concerned may also have a wife and other relatives living with him who may have even higher value assets and savings.

Mrs Fok also asked why a system should be introduced which would treat the unemployed more generously than the elderly, the disabled and the young who would not be eligible for any CSSA support if they had such a high level of savings.

The Hon Frederick Fung proposed to impose a time limit for the period during which unemployment assistance payments could be made.

Mrs Fok, however, pointed out that if such a person had savings, it seemed reasonable to expect part of those savings to be used to meet his daily needs before expecting others in the community, who might well be less well off, to provide him with an income through the taxes they paid.

"It is also not clear what the position would be if the person remains unemployed after having received assistance for six months," she said.

As regards the Hon Fred Li's suggestion to provide a CSSA payment of \$2,750 for an unemployed adult, Mrs Fok argued that this could only be justified in terms of the CSSA scheme if one was satisfied the real needs of the unemployed were much greater than the needs of other vulnerable groups.

"I am not satisfied that such a case can be made," she stressed, "Nor do I believe that the CSSA Scheme is the right vehicle to use to address a perceived need for unemployment benefits."

Mr Li further proposed to raise the level of assets a person should be able to hold while being eligible for CSSA payments to \$96,000.

To this suggestion, Mr Fok said this would appear to be high for a single person although she noted that under the current CSSA rules an asset limit of \$71,000 would apply to an unemployed person living in a family unit of four persons.

Since there were no statistics on the level of assets generally held in Hong Kong, Mrs Fok said the impact of any major relaxation of this eligibility criterion was particularly difficult to assess in financial terms.

Any major relaxation could obviously expand considerably the numbers of people becoming eligible for CSSA.

She said all of the recommendations arising from the current CSSA Review, including that on the asset limits, would be set out for members early next year with all the background information to support a fully informed debate on them.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

SHW on unemployment assistance scheme

* * * * *

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, at the motion debate on an Unemployment Assistance Scheme in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

We have the greatest sympathy for the hardship and trauma faced by the unemployed, many of whom may be facing unemployment for the first time in their working lives. I think we know what these people want - and it is not a cash handout. They want jobs. And, as has just been explained by my colleague, the Secretary for Education and Manpower, that is precisely what we are trying to provide. However, we also need to look after those in need. At the end of the day, if new employment is not found, our 'safety net' is firm and remains in place. The CSSA will always provide the ultimate support to meet basic needs and, indeed, we have recently proposed significant increases in CSSA payments to adults including those who are unemployed.

Mr President, the Motion and the amendments proposed to it all refer to a failure of the current Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme to relieve the immediate financial needs of the unemployed. Failure implies the Scheme is not doing something it was supposed to do. But the CSSA Scheme was not designed to meet the immediate needs of the unemployed, regardless of their financial means. Unemployed persons can and do receive CSSA payments, but they do so only if their income is unable to meet their recognised needs and if the value of their assets does not exceed the permitted limit.

I have explained many times before in this Council but it bears repeating again today, that the CSSA provides no more than a 'safety net' for those unable to support themselves financially, for whatever reason - whether it be because of old age, disability, illness or, indeed, unemployment. The Honourable Fred Li suggested in his speech that we should simplify the current procedures for processing CSSA applications by unemployed persons so that assistance could be given more speedily. We agree with this suggestion and are urgently examining our procedures. Nevertheless, I can assure honourable member that for those in genuine financial need, it can be provided very quickly, sometime within one or two days of application. The level of payments in the CSSA Scheme are set to cover basic needs for food, clothing, housing, fuel, light, water and transport as well as for household goods. In addition, payments are made to meet the educational expenses of children and other specific needs of an individual or his or her family. Medical treatment for recipients at public clinics and hospitals is free. On average, a family of four now receives \$8,610 per month and a single person receives \$2,650 which is, as a matter of interest, about 30% of the median wage.

The 'Unemployment Assistance Scheme' proposed in the Motion seeks to provide unemployed persons who are in need of assistance with a certain level of income. The Motion does not suggest how it is to be judged whether such persons are in need of assistance.

But the Hon Chan Yuen-han has suggested today in her speech that an unemployed person should be eligible for assistance only if he or she has savings below \$116,000. We must then ask ourselves whether it is reasonable to ask taxpayers to provide financial support to a person who may have \$116,000 in savings, bearing in mind that some of those taxpayers in lower paid jobs may not even have such a high level of savings themselves. In addition to that \$116,000 of savings, the person concerned may also have a spouse and other relatives living with him who may have even higher value assets and savings. This, I understand, would be disregarded since the proposed savings limit would be assessed on an individual rather than on a family basis. It should be noted that in the CSSA Scheme the asset limit is applied on a family unit basis.

Another question this proposal prompts is why should an unemployed person be allowed to keep such a level of assets and yet receive public financial assistance in the form of an unemployment assistance payment, whereas the old, the disabled and the young are allowed to retain only a lower level of assets before becoming eligible to receive public assistance in the form of CSSA Scheme payments.

On the other hand, the Hon Frederick Fung's amendment seeks to delete the test of giving unemployment assistance only to those who are in need and imposes a time limit for the period during which assistance payments can be made. Under this proposal an unemployed person could receive assistance regardless of the level of savings he may have and regardless of his actual needs. If such a person had savings, it seems reasonable to me to expect part of those savings to be used to meet his daily needs before expecting others in the community, who may well be less well off, to provide him with an income through the taxes they pay. It is also not clear what the position would be if the person remained unemployed after having received assistance for six months.

Of course, some countries do have unemployment benefit schemes but these are, in almost all cases, schemes to which employers and/or employees contribute over time. Our CSSA Scheme is a non-contributory welfare payment system. As I have said before, it should not be 'hijacked' to perform a role that it was never intended to play. The Hon Fred Li's amendment would mean breaking with the central philosophy of the CSSA Scheme by providing a payment at a level raised artificially higher than that needed to address basic needs. A standard rate of \$2,750 for an unemployed adult would also be higher than that now provided for the elderly, for children and for people with a disability. This could only be justified in terms of the CSSA Scheme policy if we were satisfied that the real needs of the unemployed were that much greater than the needs of these other vulnerable groups. I am not satisfied that such a case can be made. Nor do I believe that the CSSA Scheme is the right vehicle to use to address a perceived need for unemployment benefits.

In his speech today, the Hon Fred Li has clarified that his proposed CSSA rate for unemployed adults is based on the recommendations made in Professor MacPherson's Report of June 1994. I recently explained to this Council on 2 November why we cannot accept the recommendations in that Report which are based on a different philosophy. In short, we believe the CSSA should seek to meet basic needs only rather than seek to maintain a certain lifestyle.

Amongst other things, our current review of the CSSA Scheme is examining the level of assets a person should be able to hold while being eligible for CSSA payments. I note the recommendation made by the Hon Fred Li that this asset limit should be raised to \$96,000 per person. While not wishing to pre-empt the outcome of the current review, this would appear to be high for a single person. But it is not that much higher than the current CSSA asset limit of \$71,000 which would apply to an unemployed person living in a family unit of four persons. Since we have no statistics on the level of assets generally held in Hong Kong, the impact of any major relaxation of this eligibility criterion is particularly difficult to assess in financial terms, but any major relaxation could obviously expand considerably the numbers of people becoming eligible. All of the recommendations arising from the CSSA Review, including that on the asset limits, will be set out for Members early next year with all the background information to support a fully informed debate on them.

Mr President, the Administration therefore urges Members to think very carefully before supporting the Motion or either of the two proposed amendments. There is no justification for an Unemployment Assistance Scheme nor for massive increases in the level of CSSA payments.

Thank you.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Rehabilitation of Offenders Bill

* * * * *

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in moving the second reading of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Amendment) Bill 1995 in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Mr President,

I move that the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Amendment) Bill 1995 be read the second time. The Bill mainly seeks to expand the scope of the rehabilitation scheme under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Ordinance so that more people who have committed minor offences can benefit.

The current rehabilitation scheme provides that where a person, on a first conviction, was not sentenced to imprisonment or a fine exceeding \$5,000, the conviction can be regarded as spent for most purposes after three years so long as he has no further conviction. The person concerned is permitted to say nothing about his/her previous conviction in his/her business and social dealings, such as in applications for jobs, hire purchase, insurance, and the like. Moreover, the person cannot lawfully be refused employment or admission to a profession on account of his/her spent conviction. Unauthorised disclosure of a spent conviction is an offence.

Taking account of the views of the public on various proposals to improve the scheme, the Fight Crime Committee has made a number of recommendations which are incorporated into the Bill now put before Members.

We propose that the scheme should be expanded to cover persons who, on a first conviction, are sentenced to imprisonment for not more than three months or a fine not exceeding \$10,000. We propose that persons who have been convicted of triad related offences, but have subsequently renounced their triad membership under the Triad Renunciation Scheme, should be covered by the scheme, provided that they meet the other criteria.

We propose that payments under the fixed penalty scheme and other minor traffic convictions to be spent immediately without the waiting period of three years. Nevertheless, for public safety reasons, we propose that for vocational drivers, such payments and convictions should only be spent after a period of three years, so as to enable transport operators to take into account the vocational drivers' traffic conviction records in determining their applications for employment.

Another change we propose to the existing scheme is that convictions should be 'once spent, always spent'. That is to say, where a convicted person is not reconvicted after three years, then his first conviction will become spent and will not revive, even if he were convicted of another offence at a later date. Having said that, the second offence will not be allowed to be spent, lest it might lead to a loss of deterrence against repeated offenders of minor crimes. Moreover, arrangements will be made to enable the spent conviction of a reconvicted person to be brought to the attention of the court for sentencing purposes to avoid a repeated offender being treated as a first time offender.

The present scheme does not apply to certain professions and public offices where the public has a right to expect the highest standard of probity. Following this principle, we now propose further exclusions to the scheme. These include certain proceedings under the Banking Ordinance and the Insurance Companies Ordinance; and the staff of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC), the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance.

We also propose to exclude proceedings relating to the determination of an application as a foster parent from the scheme, so as to allow the Director of Social Welfare to consider admitting any evidence relating to spent convictions of a person in assessing his or her suitability as a foster parent. This will better protect the interests of those children who will be placed under foster care service.

Mr President, the proposals I have outlined above seek to strike the right balance between allowing more people to benefit from the rehabilitation scheme, and ensuring that public expectations of probity in certain positions will not be at stake.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Training of local professionals for PAA

* * * * *

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Samuel Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Gordon Siu, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Since the establishment of the Provisional Airport Authority (PAA) in 1990, the bulk of the planning, design and administrative work on the new airport at Chek Lap Kok has been carried out by expatriate professionals from overseas. In view of this, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether adequate training opportunities and facilities have been provided within the PAA to effect the "transfer of technology" to local professionals; and

(b) whether, upon the scheduled completion of the new airport in the first quarter of 1998, local professionals will have received adequate training or equipped themselves with appropriate technical skills to handle the management of the airport with minimum dependence on the service of overseas professionals?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Provisional Airport Authority's employment policy is to recruit the best person for the job through open recruitment. Priority is given to appointment of permanent residents of Hong Kong given qualifications being equal. The Authority only recruits from overseas in the absence of suitably qualified candidates in Hong Kong.

The Authority now has a staff team of 1,420, of which some 85% are residents of Hong Kong. Of the rest, over 90% are in the Project Division of the Authority, which has to turn to overseas recruitment because of insufficient suitable local candidates who are experienced in building new airports. The vast majority of these will leave the Authority on completion of the specific project for which they are employed.

The Authority is mindful of the need to train up local professionals with knowledge and expertise in planning and managing the new airport. It actively pursues this objective in the following ways.

Within the Authority, local and overseas staff work together on an on-going basis in teams. This team work ensures that a process of cross-fertilisation takes place in the daily work of the Authority whereby not only the local staff benefit by sharing the experience and acquiring the expertise and knowledge of their overseas colleagues, overseas staff also benefit by learning from their local counterparts about local planning, building and construction practices. Under this team approach, technology transfer is a natural process achieved through continuous cross-learning on the parts of both local and overseas staff.

Moreover, the Authority has established a training unit to develop the skills, capabilities and career prospects of its employees. Training on staff management, operations, language and airport related disciplines are available to all staff. In the year 1994/95, 866 staff attended a total of 62 in-house programmes covering a wide range of subjects. In addition, selected staff were sent to conferences and seminars related to aviation and airport operation, and overseas training and attachments with airports and equipment manufacturers to up-grade their skills and knowledge. Staff are also encouraged and given financial assistance to pursue self development studies in job-related subjects.

In 1994, the Authority initiated a graduate engineering training scheme, and currently employs 30 graduate trainee engineers. These trainees will go through a two to three year programme with exchange training attachments with other construction companies leading to their qualification as professional engineers. This programme enables the Authority to build up its local engineering team with hands on experience and knowledge in airport planning and construction work.

The actual construction work at our new airport involves a mixture of major local and overseas companies. Local staff of the Authority therefore have ample opportunities to be exposed to the most advanced construction and systems techniques employed by international contractors, consultants and equipment suppliers. In the case of equipment supplies, the Authority has incorporated in most major equipment supply contracts a requirement for the supplier to provide training to Authority staff on operation and maintenance of the equipment concerned. This helps ensure that the Authority would have its own team of equipment experts when the new airport comes into operation.

On opening, the Authority's responsibility is to operate and manage the new airport. Currently, plans are being drawn up to integrate the existing airport management staff of the Civil Aviation Department (CAD) into the Airport Authority. These staff, over 95% being locals, have many years of experience managing Kai Tak. The smooth integration of CAD staff into the Authority from Kai Tak will ensure a good and experienced core of staff in future for managing and operating the new airport. This management team will work with their commercial, legal, financial, information technology and other colleagues from all professional areas where Hong Kong has considerable strengths and absolutely no shortage of experience and expertise. I am fully confident that when our new airport opens in April 1998, Hong Kong will have a team of experienced local professionals to operate and manage the airport.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Female senior staff in UGC-funded institutions

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Law Cheung-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council whether it has provided any guidelines on appointment, recruitment and promotion matters to the seven tertiary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee with a view to achieving the objective of increasing the number of female senior staff in the institutions concerned? Also, will the Government provide this Council with the following information :

(a) the breakdown by number and percentage of women holding the positions of Member of Council, Head and Deputy Head of Institution and Head of Administrative Department in each of the institutions concerned; and

(b) the breakdown by number and percentage of women holding positions of Dean, Department Head and Professor in each of the institutions concerned ?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Administration has not provided any guidelines on appointment, recruitment and promotion matters to the seven tertiary institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) with a view to increasing the number of female senior staff in the institutions concerned. These are matters of staff recruitment and personnel management which fall within institutional autonomy. It would be inappropriate for Government to intervene.

It should be noted that no gender preference is stated in the institutions' recruitment or promotion policies and practices or in procedures for professional appointment or conferment of professional titles. Headship of departments and faculties is in most cases a concurrent appointment for academic staff and, in some cases, such positions are filled by peer election or by rotation of department or faculty staff.

In future, the Sex Discrimination Ordinance which was enacted in July 1995 for phased implementation will make it illegal to discriminate against women or men for employment, promotion, transfer or training.

Regarding part (a) of the question, a breakdown of the number and percentage of women holding Council Membership, the positions of Head and Deputy Head of Institution and Head of Administrative Department in each of the institutions concerned are shown in Annex A.

As regards part (b) of the question, a breakdown of the number and percentage of women holding positions of Dean, Department Head and Professor in each of the institutions concerned are shown in Annex B.

**Number and percentage of Female Council Members and Senior Administrators
in the Seven UGC-funded Institutions**

	Council Members		Heads and Deputy/Associate Heads of Institutions and Heads of Administrative Department(s)*	
	Female	Total	Female	Total
CityU	3 (9%)	33	3 (14%)	21
HKBU	2 (6%)	32	3 (20%)	15
LC	2 (7%)	27	5 (45%)	11
CUHK	5 (9%)	53	5 (24%)	21
PolyU	3 (10%)	29	2 (12%)	17
HKUST	1 (3%)	29	4 (18%)	22
HKU	5 (12%)	41	3 (20%)	15
	21 (8.6%)	244	25 (20.5%)	122

* Note : The Heads and Deputy/Associate Heads of Institutions include the Vice-Chancellor or President, Pro-Vice-Chancellor or Vice-President and the Heads of the Administration Department(s) include the heads of the Registrar Office, Finance Office, Estates Office, etc.

Number and percentage of Female Senior Academic in the seven UGC-funded Institutions

	Heads of Academic Units (including Deans and Department Heads)*		Professors*	
	Female	Total	Female	Total
CityU	3 (11%)	28	0 (0%)	24
HKBU	3 (10%)	31	1 (3%)	30
LC	1 (6%)	17	0 (0%)	7
CUHK	7 (9%)	78	3 (5%)	60
PolyU	4 (13%)	31	2 (5%)	37
HKUST	2 (11%)	18	2 (4%)	53
HKU	2 (4%)	54	5 (6%)	79
	22 (8.6%)	257	13 (4.5%)	290

* Note : About 10 female professors occupy concurrently senior administrative or academic positions

Drug abuse among youngsters

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Allen Lee and a reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In view of the fact that drug abuse is now a common phenomenon among youngsters and that the problem of thinner sniffing is becoming increasingly serious, will the Administration inform this Council:

(a) whether consideration has been given to introducing legislation to restrict the sale of thinners to youngsters;

(b) whether consideration has been given to stepping up publicity campaigns in schools against drug abuse; and

(c) what is the number of cases in which youngsters are involved in crimes related to soft drugs in the past year and whether there is an upward trend in such cases?

Reply:

Mr President,

(a) Given the widespread and legitimate industrial, commercial and household uses of thinner and other organic solvents, we have no plans to introduce legislative controls on their sale. The problem of thinner sniffing should best be tackled at source, by preventive education and publicity on the harmful effects of substance abuse.

(b) We have been stepping up preventive education and publicity in schools. The Education Department has taken a series of steps to strengthen drug education in schools. It is conducting a pilot scheme involving 20 secondary schools to develop and implement school-based drug education courses in the 1995/96 school year. Drug education is already integrated into the school curriculum. The Education Department is considering how drug education can be more effectively delivered to students through school subjects at different levels. Drug education will also be incorporated into a new General Studies syllabus to be implemented in primary schools in 1996.

The Education Department is also carrying out a programme of assistance and training to schools and teachers to enable them to perform their essential task of educating their students to stay away from drugs more effectively. A new three-day drug education workshop co-organised with the Narcotics Division for in-service secondary school teachers was introduced in July 1994 and is now organised regularly to enrich teachers' knowledge on drug and substance abuse and enhance their skills in implementing drug education. A one-day drug education course for primary school teachers has started in July this year. To strengthen teachers' skills in conducting preventive drug education, the Education Department jointly organised with the Community Drug Advisory Council a two-day course on Life Skills Training for Secondary School Teachers in April 1995. So far three courses have been held. A Drug Education Resource Corner was set up in September to support teachers in implementing drug education in schools, pending the opening of a separate Drug Education Resource Centre in March 1996.

The Narcotics Division has strengthened its drug education talks for secondary school students. A new package of talks was launched last month. The contents and format of the talks have been improved on the recommendations of a working group involving the Narcotics Division, the Education Department, school principals and social workers. The new talks are updated to take into account the changing trends in substance abuse, and the different needs of secondary school students in junior and upper forms. Guidelines for conducting associated activities both before and after the talk have been issued to schools to encourage them to put more emphasis on drug education and reinforce the anti-drug messages delivered during the talks.

School social workers are alert to the problem of substance abuse among students and convey anti-drug messages to students during their daily contacts. The Against Substance Abuse Scheme, established by the Social Welfare Department last month with six specially trained social workers, will focus on working with schools to combat drug abuse problems among students. The Department is producing a video programme targeted at parents on the handling of drug problems among their children. The video will be available for distribution to schools by the end of this year.

I should add in this context that the Hospital Authority also operates six Substance Abuse Clinics, aiming at weaning young people away from substance abuse. PS33, run by the Hong Kong Christian Service, also provides counselling service to youths involved in substance abuse.

(c) 776 young people under the age of 21 were arrested in 1994 for offences associated with psychotropic substances. This compares with 743 in 1993 and 724 in the first nine months of 1995.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Conversion of fishing vessels into cargo ships

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon James To and a reply by the Secretary for Economic Services, Mr Gordon Siu, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is known that on 20 April 1995 a wooden fishing vessel which has been converted into a cargo carrier capsized in the waters off the Lamma Island, resulting in the death of two crew members. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the estimated number of wooden fishing vessels in the territory which have been converted into cargo carriers;

(b) whether those wooden fishing vessels which have been converted into cargo carriers are required to undergo an "inclining test" for determining their maximum loading capacity to ensure their stable navigation; if not, why not; and

(c) of the number of shipwrecks involving such wooden fishing vessels in the past three years?

Reply:

Mr President,

(a) Applications for the conversion of wooden fishing vessels into cargo ships are rather uncommon in Hong Kong. 20 such cases have been approved by the Director of Marine during the past 30 years.

(b) When an owner of a wooden fishing vessel wishes to convert that vessel for the carriage of cargo, no stability assessment test has hitherto been required by the Marine Department.

The reason is that the traditional designs used in respect of such vessels have a long history of safe operations in Hong Kong waters and in the South China Sea. The vessels are broad compared with their length and width, are wider than other vessels, have oval-shaped hulls and higher freeboards. Therefore, if these are operated as fishing vessels, or when converted for cargo handling purposes, and operated in accordance with guidelines issued by the Director of Marine, there is no problem with their stability.

However, against the background of the recent accident, the Director of Marine has given instruction that stability assessment tests must be carried out prior to the conversion of any further wooden fishing vessels for cargo operations. He has further instructed that all existing wooden cargo vessels which have been converted from fishing vessels should be examined to determine their stability in the cargo handling mode.

(c) During the past three years, two traditional style wooden fishing vessels modified as cargo ships have foundered. In both cases deck cargo was either excessive or these goods were improperly secured.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Occupational safety in non-industrial undertakings

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Regarding the problem of occupational safety and health in non-industrial undertakings, will the Government inform this Council whether:

(a) it has conducted any surveys on occupational safety in non-industrial undertakings; if so, will the Government provide a breakdown of accidents by cause and type of occupation for the past 3 years; if not, how does the Government monitor the situation of occupational safety in non-industrial undertakings;

(b) the working environment of office workers and employees in the service industry will be covered by the Occupational Safety Bill which is being drafted; what is the progress in the drafting of the bill, when will the public be consulted and when will the bill be presented to this Council for scrutiny; and

(c) consideration has been given to bringing office workers suffering from certain common occupational diseases (such as waist and back pain, and ailments of vision and hands) under the protection of the law, so that they will be eligible for compensation?

Reply:

Mr President,

Regarding part (a) of the question, the Government has not conducted any specific surveys on occupational safety in non-industrial undertakings. However, the Labour Department keeps statistics on accidents reported by employers under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance for both industrial and non-industrial sectors. There were 20,250 accidents in non-industrial establishments in 1992, 20,865 in 1993 and 20,252 in 1994. The accident rate per 1,000 employees in the non-industrial sectors was 13.63 in 1992, 13.35 in 1993 and 11.96 in 1994. This is much lower than the accident rate in the industrial sector, where the comparable figures were 57.23 in 1992, 52.55 in 1993 and 52.93 in 1994.

The information provided under the current reporting form do not contain sufficient details to enable us to break down these accidents by cause. Steps are being taken to improve the reporting form by requiring employers to state more clearly the causes of accidents.

The number of accidents in non-industrial undertakings by type of occupation and the accident rates for 1992 to 1994 are provided in the Appendix to the written version of my reply.

As regards part (b) of the question, the Consultation Paper on the Review of Industrial Safety in Hong Kong which was published in July this year recommended that, as a broad principle, all employees should be protected by safety and health legislation and that it should be achieved in stages. This recommendation was generally supported by the public. Details of the proposed legislation to cover employees in non-industrial sectors are being drawn up and we intend to consult the Labour Advisory Board (LAB) in February 1996. The proposed legislation will include six separate sets of regulations which will lay down minimum safety and health standards in the working environment and regulate certain hazardous processes, equipment, machines and substances.

Our aim is to introduce the draft bill into this Council in June 1996. We also aim to introduce at the same time two sets of draft subsidiary regulations to provide for the general safety and health of the workplace and to regulate manual handling operations. We will consider the timing of introducing the remaining four regulations by phases.

As regards part (c) of the question, waist and back pains and ailments of vision are not compensable occupational diseases at present. Two ailments of the hand are listed as compensable occupational diseases in the Second Schedule of the Employees' Compensation Ordinance. They are cramp of the hand or forearm due to repetitive movements and traumatic inflammation of the tendons of the hand or forearm, or of the associated tendon sheaths. The Labour Department is currently conducting a comprehensive review of the Employees' Compensation Ordinance including the list of compensable occupational diseases. The review, which we hope to complete by the middle of 1996, will consider whether new occupational diseases should be added to the list.

Appendix

**Major Economic Activity (for Non-industrial Sector)
Accidents & Accident Rates for 1992-1994**

<i>Economic Activity</i>		<i>1992</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>
MEDICAL	(a) No. of Accidents	808 (1)	991 (1)	1273 (0)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	19.46	21.43	24.27
EDUCATION	(a) No. of Injuries	394 (1)	375 (3)	355 (1)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	4.65	4.23	3.95
TRANSPORT	(a) No. of Injuries	4957 (56)	4942 (60)	4692 (40)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	46.1	42.87	38.53
BANKING	(a) No. of Injuries	137 (1)	141 (0)	149 (12)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	1.19	1.16	1.14
WHOLESALE	(a) No. of Injuries	791 (3)	635 (4)	483 (6)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	10.2	8.27	6.27
RETAIL	(a) No. of Injuries	1944 (6)	1759 (8)	1976 (3)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	9.58	8.74	9.51
HOTELS	(a) No. of Injuries	882 (0)	1030 (2)	946 (1)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	22.64	25.92	24.07
OFFICE	(a) No. of Injuries	1896 (29)	2158 (35)	2191 (38)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	9.85	10.46	9.66
CIVIL SERVICE	(a) No. of Injuries	3521 (8)	3142 (6)	2692 (6)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	19.15	17.33	14.94
OTHERS *	(a) No. of Injuries	4920 (76)	5692 (76)	5495 (89)
	(b) Injuries/1000 Employees	11.15	11.72)	9.68

* 'OTHERS' include agriculture, fishing, communication, community, social and personal services

Note : Figures in brackets refer to No. of Fatal Accidents

Source : Census and Statistics Department
Labour Department

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Piling works at Ma On Shan site

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Choy Kan-pui and a reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

The discovery of underground marble caverns at a public housing site in Area 90 of Ma On Shan has aroused the concern of the existing and prospective residents in that area. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether piling works at that site will cause the ground nearby to collapse, thereby affecting the structural safety of neighbouring buildings;

(b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, whether the responsibility for causing such a danger will rest with the Housing Authority or the building contractor concerned; and

(c) whether there will be potential danger to the structure of the public housing blocks already built above the caverns; if so, what measures the Housing Authority will take to ensure the structural safety of these buildings?

Answer:

Mr President,

Before I actually answer the question and in order to avoid misunderstanding, it would be useful if I give the background on procedures relating to public housing construction in Ma On Shan Area 90. Because it is located in an area designated by the Building Authority in 1993 as a Scheduled Area under the Buildings Ordinance, owing to the existence of underground marble cavities, the design of permanent foundation works is, like other public housing construction in Scheduled Areas, subject to detailed ground investigation, assessment of geological conditions and careful design by qualified professionals in the Housing Department and its consultants. These details must be submitted to the Civil Engineering Department's Geotechnical Engineering Office for checking before the construction work actually begins.

During the construction period, the Housing Department's consultants are also responsible for proper site supervision and monitoring to ensure that piling work does not cause any significant ground subsidence, or adversely affect the safety of buildings in the vicinity. After the new buildings have been constructed, the Geotechnical Engineering Office will continue to monitor any site and building settlement for an appropriate period, normally several years.

The standard procedures described above have been followed in the case of public housing construction in Ma On Shan Area 90 to ensure building safety. Detailed investigations were carried out under the supervision of the Housing Department's consultants between 1989 and 1993, in consultation with the Housing Department and the Geotechnical Engineering Office. Piling work then began in early 1993, and the project is to be completed in six phases between 1996 and 2000.

As regards the specific question asked by Mr Choy, through careful planning and foundation design, development of buildings in the Scheduled Area is feasible and safe. A minor, localised subsidence took place during piling work in Phase 5 of the project. There has been no suggestion from any of the concerned parties that this minor subsidence itself will affect the buildings in the earlier four phases or other structures in the vicinity. In other words, no effects have been caused.

As I said in my reply to the question from the Hon Emily Lau last week (15 November), the piling contractor considers it unsafe to carry on with the work. The Housing Department's consultants hold the view that it is safe to continue, given the specialist design of the piling work and the detailed technical requirements specified in the contract. As a result, the Housing Department has instructed these two parties to re-examine the design and details of the piling work, and to reconcile their differences. Should the disagreement between the two parties continue after the re-examination, the Housing Authority may have to consider resorting to third party arbitration.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Standard for provision of multi-media services

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Miriam Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Recreation and Culture, Mr Chau Tak-hay, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is learnt that the Recreation and Culture Branch is working jointly with the Telecommunications Authority to draw up a set of standards for the provision of multi-media services. In this regard, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the reasons why the responsibility for setting standards for the provision of multi-media services should come within the purview of the Recreation and Culture Branch, instead of the Economic Services Branch which has the policy responsibility for telecommunications matters; and

(b) whether the Government will set up an inter-departmental working group to study matters in relation to the setting of standards for multi-media services; if not, what measures will be taken to ensure that the promotion of multi-media services is in keeping with the development of the telecommunications industry?

Reply:

The transmission of multi-media services over telecommunications networks is a telecommunications service and as such is regulated by the Telecommunications Authority, for which the Economic Services Branch has policy responsibility. However, the Recreation and Culture Branch has an interest in respect of the content of those multi-media services which offer programming similar to broadcast services. Developments in multi-media services, and the extent to which regulation is required, are already the subject of discussion in an inter-departmental working group, and policy proposals will be submitted to the Executive Council in due course.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Rise in cost of living

* * * * *

Following is a question by Dr the Hon David Li Kwok-po and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services, Mr Rafael Hui, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday);

Question:

The cumulative rise in the consumer price index over the last five years is only 17% in the United States but is over 60% in Hong Kong. The rise in the cost of living in the territory has caused a significant rise in our labour costs, particularly in the service and other labour-intensive industries. In view of this, will the Administration inform this Council whether measures are being taken or planned to preserve the competitiveness of our service industry in the face of the chronic rise in the cost of living and rentals?

Reply:

In discussing the rise in the consumer price index as reflecting higher inflation in the economy along with the rise in labour costs and property rentals, we have to be clear about the underlying causes. For a number of years, Hong Kong was faced with a very tight resource situation, particularly in labour and accommodation. The tight labour market, until more recently, has led to rapid increase in wages as the market mechanism worked to balance limited labour supply against strong demand. Similarly, the strong demand for accommodation against the severe land constraint in Hong Kong has led to an upsurge in property prices and rentals. The rise in resource costs then feeds into the production process and pushes up the prices of goods and services in the local economy, thereby resulting in higher domestically generated inflation. Contrary to what some commentators may have argued, it is not so much the rise in inflation feeding into higher labour costs and rentals as the reverse.

It is therefore essential to recognise that a relatively more abundant supply of the key resources, namely labour and accommodation, can be expected to contribute to the lowering of inflation in Hong Kong. At the present moment, already we are witnessing the economy moving in such a direction. The labour market has eased considerably, not due to a shrinkage in total employment but due mainly to a rather faster increase in labour supply in relative terms. While it is unfortunate that the unemployment rate has picked up as a result, increase in labour costs has begun to ease. The property market also has consolidated from the exceptional buoyancy in 1993 and the early part of 1994, and both property prices and rentals have fallen. In short, the market process is now working to alleviate the strong pressure on the cost of doing business in Hong Kong.

Our tried and tested policy of fostering a highly competent, productive and adaptable labour force in an economy that is undergoing structural changes, and of providing an adequate supply of land for property development to meet the growth in demand, constitute the best safeguard against excessive rises in the cost of doing business. This policy also should continue to enable us to restrain inflation, as well as help preserve the cost competitiveness of our service industry.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Prices of private residential properties

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Chin-shek and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Regarding the price of private residential properties, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the average rate of increase in private residential property prices in each of the past 3 years, as compared with the respective rates of increase in inflation and the wages of local employees over the corresponding period; and

(b) whether it will introduce additional measures in the near future to further curb property prices ?

Answer:

Mr President,

The statistical information requested is given below :

	Actual price index for selected private residential developments		Consumer Price Index (A)		Overall nominal wage index	
	Year-on-year rate of increase	Average annual rate of increase	Year-on-year rate of increase	Average annual rate of increase	Year-on-year rate of increase	Average annual rate of increase
1993	8.7%	8.3%	8.5%	8.6%	11%	9.8%
1994	31.2%		8.1%		9.5%	
1995	-10.9% ⁽¹⁾		9.1% ⁽¹⁾		9% ⁽²⁾	

Notes

⁽¹⁾ : Latest available information as at September 1995.

⁽²⁾ : Latest available information as at March 1995.

We are satisfied that the anti-speculation measures are achieving the desired results, and will closely monitor the property market to guard against a revival of speculation. We do not intend to relax the existing measures or to introduce additional ones in the near future. The situation will be reviewed on a regular basis.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Living area for Temporary Housing Area tenants

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Fung Kin-kee and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Mr Dominic Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In regard to the living area for Temporary Housing Area (THA) tenants, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) how the size of living area for THA tenants is determined;
- (b) what is the size of living area per tenant of a THA household below which the THA household is classified as overcrowded;
- (c) what arrangements will normally be made for transferring overcrowded THA households and what is the average waiting time for such a household to get a transfer;
- (d) of the total number of overcrowded THA households in the territory, together with a breakdown of such household by district; and
- (e) whether there is any plan to increase the size of living area for THA tenants; if so, when the plan will be implement; if not, why not?

Answer:

Mr President,

The size of living areas allocated to Temporary Housing Area (THA) tenants is determined in accordance with the Housing Authority's allocation standards which are set out below:

Size of unit (square metres)	Number of occupants (person per unit)	Space per person (square metres)
3.8 or 4.6	1	3.8 or 4.6
8.21	1 to 2	4.11 to 8.21
9.85	2 to 3	3.28 to 4.93
13.13	2 to 4	3.28 to 6.57
16.42	3 to 5	3.28 to 5.47
19.69	4 to 6	3.28 to 4.92
21.88	5 to 7	3.13 to 4.38
24.06	6 to 8	3.01 to 4.01
26.25	7 to 9	2.92 to 3.75
30.08	8 to 10	3.01 to 3.76

When the living space per person in a unit is below 2.79 square metres for full-built THAs or below 3.4 square metres for part-built THAs, the household is classified as overcrowded and is eligible for overcrowding relief.

Overcrowded households may apply for transfer to larger units in the same THA. The time taken to effect a transfer depends on the availability of larger units.

There are 835 overcrowded households in THAs in the territory. Their distribution is as follows:

District	Number of overcrowded households in THAs
Eastern	1
Wong Tai Sin	53
Sham Shui Po	70
Tuen Mun	35
Tsuen Wan	36
North	64
Kwai Tsing	122
Sai Kung	149
Sha Tin	305

There are no immediate plans to improve THA allocation standards as we are constrained by the continuing demand and limited availability of THA accommodation in the next few years.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Discharged mental patients sharing public housing units

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Fred Li Wah-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

With regard to a recent wounding incident involving four discharged mental patients who shared the same public housing unit, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the total number of cases in which discharged mental patients were allocated public housing units through arrangements made by the Social Welfare Department in the past three years;

(b) whether the social workers concerned have paid any visits to the discharged mental patients involved in the above-mentioned incident in the past two years; if not, what are the reasons; and

(c) what interim and long-term measures the Government has put in place to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future?

Reply:

(a) Over the three years up to and including 1994/95, 463 ex-mentally ill people have been allocated public housing units through the Compassionate Rehousing Scheme.

(b) Over the past two years, the four persons involved in the case in question have been in regular contact with social workers and officers of Social Welfare Department when receiving various welfare services including medical social services, training in sheltered workshops and benefits under the Comprehensive Social Security Scheme. They have attended follow-up sessions at psychiatric clinics at regular intervals. Social workers who had been in contact with them in delivering these services had not noticed any particular problems before the occurrence of this incident. In view of the regular contacts between the four and social workers in the provision of services, it had been considered unnecessary to supplement these contacts with any home visits.

(c) We are reminding social workers of the need to pay close attention to any inter-personal problems that may exist among ex-mentally ill clients and other people who are sharing accommodation with them. Particular care must be exercised when recommending the sharing of public housing units by persons with a history of mental illness. For the longer term, we intend to establish two additional Assistant Social Welfare Officer posts in 1996/97 to improve after-care services for those discharged from half-way houses.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Financial Secretary's comments on property prices

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Man-kwong and a written reply by the acting Financial Secretary, Mr Gordon Siu, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

The Financial Secretary (FS) commented in late October that property prices at present were "close to bottoming out", and that although the prices were still 20% higher than those in 1993, the property market had returned to the normal track if the inflation in the last two years was taken into account. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the basis on which the FS's comment was made and why the FS believed that property prices in 1993 were at the normal level;

(b) whether the FS's comment on prices in the private sector is in violation of the principle of non-interventionism; and

(c) whether the FS's comment is an indication that the Government's aim to curb property prices has been achieved and that the Government is going to relax the relevant measures now in force; if so, whether the Government has considered that such a move may trigger off a rise in property prices which will make it difficult for families in need of a home to purchase their own flats, thus resulting in the Governor's pledge of helping more families to become home owners more difficult to materialise?

Answer:

(a) Property prices increased sharply in 1993 and early 1994. It was against this background that the Government decided to introduce a package of price-stabilisation measures in June 1994. The price level in 1993 is therefore a natural reference point for making comparisons with current prices.

Since the introduction of anti-speculation measures, property prices have stabilised. The price index in September 1995 was about 24% lower than the peak in April 1994. Although the index was still 22% higher than that in January 1993, the difference was roughly in line with inflation during the same period at about 24% in terms of the CPI(A).

The Government does not have in mind a pre-determined acceptable level of prices. The Financial Secretary's remarks were made simply to reflect the success of the price-stabilisation measures in dampening speculation and allowing the market to find its own equilibrium.

(b) The level of property prices has always been a matter of public concern. It is normal and appropriate for Government officials to speak on this subject in response to media enquiries. The Financial Secretary's remarks should not be taken as a prediction of price movements, but as an observation on the current price level as compared with that in 1993. There is no question of violating the principle of non-intervention.

(c) The stabilisation of property prices will increase people's affordability to buy homes. We are satisfied that the anti-speculation measures are achieving the desired results. We do not intend to relax these measures, but will closely monitor the property market to guard against a revival of speculation. The situation will be reviewed on a regular basis.

The Government has declared its intention to promote home ownership. We will help over 190,000 families to buy their own homes between April 1995 and April 2001 through various subsidised home ownership schemes and housing loan schemes. We are confident that a home ownership rate of 55% can be achieved by 1997, and will improve on that level thereafter.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

SAR passports for ethnic minorities

* * * * *

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Leong Che-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

With regard to the recent report that the ethnic minorities in the territory would not be eligible to apply for the Special Administrative Region passports, will the Administration inform this Council whether it has taken any action to ask the British Government to discuss the issue of the nationality of the territory's ethnic minorities with the Chinese Government; if so, what action has been taken and with what result?

Reply:

Mr President,

Ethnic minorities in Hong Kong who hold a foreign passport will qualify for the right of abode in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region if they satisfy the requirements set out in the Joint Declaration and Article 24(2)(4) of the Basic Law. Their nationality will not be affected.

Ethnic minorities who hold BDTC or BN(O) passports only will continue to have the right of abode in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after 1997 if they do not have the right of abode elsewhere before 1997. This is provided for in the Joint Declaration and Article 24(2)(6) of the Basic Law.

Ethnic minorities who are BDTCs can apply for BN(O) passports before 1 July 1997, or become British Overseas Citizens (BOCs) automatically on that date if they have no nationality other than British. Their children will automatically become BOCs if they would otherwise be stateless. Their grandchildren will be able to acquire the BOC status by registration if they would otherwise be stateless.

The eligibility criteria for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport are set out generally in Article 154 of the Basic Law. The British side are continuing to discuss with the Chinese side in the Joint Liaison Group on questions relating to the right of abode in Hong Kong after 1997 and the eligibility for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports. We place importance on an early resolution of these issues, and hope that a satisfactory agreement with the Chinese side could be achieved as soon as possible.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Transmission of Hepatitis B

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Huang Chen-ya and a written reply by the Secretary for Health and Welfare, Mrs Katherine Fok, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In view of the transmissibility of Hepatitis B, some countries have introduced regulations to minimise the risk of medical personnel who are Hepatitis B carriers transmitting the disease to patients during invasive operations using sharp instruments. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council :

(a) of the number of patients in hospitals under the management of the Hospital Authority who have been infected with the Hepatitis B virus within a few weeks of an operation in the past three years; and

(b) what guidelines and measures does the Government have to prevent the transmission of Hepatitis B to patients by medical personnel?

Reply:

(a) In the past three years, there has not been any notifiable reports of Hepatitis B being transmitted to patients by health care personnel during invasive operations using sharp instruments in hospitals under the management of the Hospital Authority. As a point for Members' information, multi-disciplinary committees have been established in all public hospitals to enforce proper infection control measures and infectious diseases surveillance.

(b) To reduce the risk of Hepatitis B virus (HBV) transmission, the Department of Health has formulated two sets of guidelines entitled "Procedure for Management of Needlestick Injury or Mucosal Contact with Blood or Body Fluids" and "Preventing Hepatitis B Transmission in Health Care Settings - Guidelines and Practices" respectively. The first set of these guidelines has been updated three times since 1992, and the second set was promulgated as recently as May 1995.

The focus of these guidelines is on the adoption of quality infection control practice, provision of vaccination, and effective management of occupational exposure. The guidelines are distributed on a regular basis to all public and private hospitals as well as service units operated by the Department of Health to remind health care personnel of appropriate procedures to be adopted in order to prevent HBV transmission.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Relocation of manufacturing processes to China

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Henry Tang Ying-yen and a written reply by the acting Secretary for Trade and Industry, Mr Ho Suen-wai, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

The relocation of manufacturing processes to mainland China has resulted in the gradual transformation of the territory's economy from one which relies on low-cost and labour-intensive industries to one which is dominated by capital-intensive and service industries. In view of this, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it has conducted studies to ascertain which capital-intensive or medium- and high-technology industries are more intensively developed in the territory at present; if so, at what stages are such industries being developed, and how do they compare with those in Singapore, Taiwan and Korea; and

(b) whether it will consider co-operating further with scientific and technological research institutions in China so as to bring their expertise into the territory and apply it to product development locally, if so, what are the details and what is the progress?

Reply:

Mr President,

The Industry Department conducts, on a regular basis, studies and surveys on the manufacturing industry. These studies analyse the strengths and weaknesses of specific industrial sectors and make recommendations on how the Government could assist to enhance their capability for high value-added production. The most intensively developed capital intensive and higher technology industries covered by these surveys and studies include the production of liquid crystal displays, micro-motors, printed circuit boards, integrated circuit assembly, plastic injection moulding machinery, die-casting, micro-batteries, and transistors. In these areas, Hong Kong enjoys a leading position both in terms of volume production and technology level among the other Asian developing economies. In addition, the linkage industry which converts raw materials into semi-manufactured parts and components, the printing and computer software industries are also growing well. And the technology level of the computer software industry is comparable to that of industry leaders in the region, and the total value of output is just behind Taiwan.

Effective and productive technology collaboration with China must be market-driven. Already there is a considerable degree of collaboration between research/tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and those in China. Some of our industrialists are also making use of Chinese technology resources in their production processes. In addition, since June this year the Government has operated a financial assistance scheme aimed at encouraging and facilitating local companies to undertake applied research and product development projects which draw on research and development (R&D) and technological expertise in China. The scheme, called the Co-operative Applied Research and Development Scheme (CARDS), offers funds up to 75% of the cost of an approved applied R&D project provided it is to be undertaken by a project team comprising relevant researchers from research/tertiary institutions in China and Hong Kong. So far, three projects in the telecommunication and biotechnology fields have been approved, with a commitment totalling \$16 million under the scheme. The Administration will continue to explore opportunities for further technology co-operation with China.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Measures to boost morale of CSD officers

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Hon-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Peter Lai, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

It is reported that the Legal Department has decided not to prosecute four Vietnamese migrants (VMs) who were suspected of assaulting law enforcement officers during the disturbance which took place at the Whitehead Detention Centre in May this year. According to the report, both the Correctional Services Department (which is responsible for the transfer operations of VMs) and the Police Force Council (which represents the four staff associations of the Police Force) are dissatisfied with the Legal Department's decision as it may set a precedent which may give the VMs the misconception that they will not be prosecuted even if they assault law enforcement officers. It is also reported that some CSD officers with five to ten years' service have recently applied for transfer to the hawkers control teams. In view of this, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the reasons for not prosecuting the VMs; and

(b) what measures will be taken to boost the morale of members of the disciplined services responsible for transfer operations of VMs and to retain them in the service?

Reply:

Mr President,

It is not the practice of the Attorney General's Chambers to disclose the reasons for pursuing or not pursuing a particular prosecution. Each case is considered on its own merits. The decision not to prosecute any persons arising from the operation in May to remove Vietnamese migrants from the Whitehead Detention Centre was made after the most careful consideration of all relevant factors. These factors included the quality of the evidence gathered, the surrounding circumstances of any alleged offences, how serious the alleged offences were, what the practical effects were, whether there were any extenuating circumstances, and how any decision to launch a prosecution might affect other people. In coming to the decision not to prosecute, the Attorney General had to assess where the interests of public justice lie.

The Administration can however confirm that there is no policy that Vietnamese migrants are exempted from prosecution. No one in Hong Kong is above the law.

The disciplined services have demonstrated exemplary professionalism and restraint in dealing with difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. The Administration and the senior management of the Police Force and the Correctional Services Department are aware of the concerns of the staff, which are currently addressed effectively through various channels. The Administration will continue to resolve difficulties faced by the disciplined services through these well-established channels. We have recently taken steps to improve the quality of protective equipment used in transfer operations. The Commissioner of Correctional Services is liaising closely with the staff of his Department. The staff are encouraged to use departmental liaison channels to discuss their concerns, so that the Commissioner and other parts of the Administration may ensure that working conditions are maintained at as high a standard as possible.

As regards reports that experienced CSD officers have applied to join the hawker control teams, the facts are as follows:

(a) up to October in 1995, 49 CSD at the Assistant Officer II (AOII) rank, which is the recruitment rank, have transferred to the hawker control team. No officers at the more senior posts have transferred; and

(b) this figure represents a very small proportion (1.68%) of CSD officers in the AO II rank.

The wastage rate of the Correctional services Officers, at 5.7%, is within normal acceptable levels, and has indeed improved over the years. There is also no difficulty in recruitment to fill vacancies, as evidenced by the fact that 6,795 candidates applied for 245 posts during the last nine months.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Telephone services provided by government departments

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Albert Chan and a written reply by the Chief Secretary, the Hon Anson Chan, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

In his reply to a question on enquiry hot-lines provided by the Government which I raised in this Council in May this year, the Chief Secretary stated that government departments would continue to keep under constant review the possibility of installing more communication devices and making other improvements to enhance the services provided by the enquiry hot-lines. However, the enquiry hot-lines service provided by government departments still varies greatly in quality. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it has conducted a review of the enquiry hot-lines service provided by various government departments since May this year; if so, what are the findings; and

(b) what measures the Government has put in place to improve the enquiry hot-lines service in departments such as the Legal Aid Department and the Immigration Department where the public have experienced difficulties in putting a call through?

Reply:

Mr President,

(a) In order to obtain an overview on telephone services provided by government departments, the Efficiency Unit co-ordinated a data gathering exercise from June to September this year. For the purpose of this exercise we defined a hotline to be a telephone service which provides direct and immediate access to members of staff. Information so gathered indicated that there are currently some 47 hotlines in 26 departments. These hotlines are supported by some 135 telephone lines of which 81 operate an 8-hour service, 13 operate a 16-hour service, and 41 operate a 24-hour service. From January to August this year, these hotlines handled an average of some 1,400 calls per month each, or 66,000 in total.

In addition, some 27 departments operate automated telephone enquiry systems, offering 24-hour service which are sometimes classified as hotlines.

(b) The Director of Legal Aid and the Director of Immigration are responsible for the quality of service, including telephone services, provided by their departments.

In May this year, the Immigration Department conducted a review of their automated telephone enquiry system. As a result, the Department is exploring means to

(i) promote the use of enquiry services outside office hours, on television and through guidance leaflets and posters;

(ii) increase the number of telephone enquiry lines; and

(iii) increase the number of staff allocated to manning telephone services.

In July 1994, the Legal Aid Department introduced an automated telephone enquiry system supported by 8 telephone lines and a facsimile line. Following a recent review of the service, the Department will shortly change the structure of the recorded answers, so that the most popular questions can be dealt with more efficiently.

Following the data gathering exercise, the Efficiency Unit is considering what guidelines might be issued to departments on telephone services, and on performance measures which should be considered.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Textile and clothing industries

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Yiu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Mr Joseph W P Wong, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question :

Will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective numbers of factories in the textiles, clothing and spinning industries which have closed down over the past three years, as well as the number of workers dismissed as a result of the closure of these factories; and

(b) whether it has any interim measures and long-term policies to assist these declining industries and to provide protection for those workers who are left jobless as a result of the closure of factories in these industries?

Reply:

Mr President,

(a) We have no statistics on the number of textiles and clothing factories which have closed down during the past three years, or the number of workers affected by such closures. Statistics are however collected on the number of establishments and workers engaged in the textiles and clothing industries. It is however not possible to ascertain from the aggregate statistics for the past three years as shown in the Annex the number of such establishments which have closed down and the number of workers affected.

(b) The Government has been encouraging the manufacturing industries to improve their competitiveness through increasing productivity and producing higher value-added products. We have adopted the following measures in respect of the textile and clothing industry:

(i) conducting consultancy studies regularly to assist the textiles and clothing industries to assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;

(ii) providing facilities to help the textiles and clothing industries to improve their productivity and operational efficiency, such as the Clothing Technology Demonstration Centre and the Quick Response Centre;

(iii) working closely with tertiary educational institutions, the Vocational Training Council, the Hong Kong Productivity Council and the Clothing Industry Training Authority to develop consultancy services and training programmes for the industries; and

(iv) funding, through the Industrial Support Fund, projects which are conducive to the technological development of the textile and clothing industries as a whole, such as those which will facilitate the industries to shift to higher-tech, higher value-added production.

Workers affected by the closure of factories in the textiles, clothing and spinning industries are protected by provisions under the Employment Ordinance (Cap 57) governing benefits for employees who are dismissed or retrenched by their employers.

These include payment of wages, wages in lieu of notice, annual leave pay, end of year payment, severance payment and long service payment. In case of disputes over such payments, the Labour Department will provide conciliation service to assist both the employers and the employees involved to come to a settlement. Employees who are owed wages, wages in lieu of notice and severance payment by their insolvent employers may also apply for ex-gratia payment from the Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund.

The Labour Department provides free employment and counselling services for all job-seekers through its network of 9 offices in the territory. It has been offering a series of employment assistance services to dismissed and retrenched workers. Also available to these workers are the Outreaching Placement Service which provides on-the-spot assistance to workers affected by major retrenchments, and the Job Matching Programme which provides unemployed workers aged 30 or above with targeted and personalised services to match them with job vacancies.

Workers affected by retrenchments may also apply to the Employees Retraining Board for enrolment in suitable retraining courses so as to equip themselves with marketable skills to re-enter the workforce.

Number of Establishments and Persons Engaged in
Hong Kong's Clothing and Textiles Industries, 1992-1994

Year	Clothing Industry		Textiles Industry (other than spinning)		Spinning	
	No. of Establishments	No. of Persons Engaged	No. of Establishments	No. of Persons Engaged	No. of Establishments	No. of Persons Engaged
1992	6 980# (16.6)	186 607# (32.7)	3 282*# (7.8)	53 340*# (9.3)
1993	6 943 (17.7)	167 273 (32.9)	2 809 (7.2)	39 204 (7.7)	78 (0.2)	4 502 (0.9)
1994	5 628 (16.5)	137 287 (31.3)	2 430 (7.1)	31 956 (7.3)	52 (0.2)	3 898 (0.9)

Notes : (1) Figures in brackets denote the percentage share of all manufacturing industries in the respective year.
(2) #In 1992, hosiery, knitted underwear and wrist watch bands were classified under the textiles industry, instead of the clothing industry.
(3) *As the Survey of Employment, Vacancies and Payroll was conducted as a sample survey instead of a full enumeration for the industrial sector in 1992, the 1992 figures for spinning are not available. The 1992 figures for the textiles industry (other than spinning) cover the entire textiles industry (including spinning).
.. denotes not available

Sources : Report of Employment, Vacancies and Payroll Statistics, Census & Statistics Department

Development statement for South East Kowloon

* * * * *

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen Leung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

With regard to the land-use planning of the land to be released upon the relocation of the existing Airport, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the progress of the above-mentioned planning work;
- (b) of the initial ratio of various land uses (such as public housing, Home Ownership Scheme estates, private housing and so on) designated in the preliminary planning stage; and
- (c) whether the development of the land in question will have any strategic role to play in the overall development and urban redevelopment of Kowloon; if so, what are the details?

Answer:

Mr President,

(a) A development statement for South East Kowloon covering the site of the existing airport, Kowloon Bay and adjoining areas in Kowloon City-Kowloon Bay was completed in September 1993. Based on the development statement, an outline development plan was produced. The results of the study were presented inter alia, to the Town Planning Board (in June 1994), the Kowloon City and Kwun Tong District Boards (in June and July 1994), and the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works of this Council (in May 1994).

Detailed consultancy studies were commissioned by Project Manager/Kowloon in September 1995 to examine the engineering feasibility of the required works, to make necessary adjustments to planning proposals, to focus on the preparation of detailed development proposals for the initial phases and to formulate ideas for the temporary uses of sites. The study is expected to be completed in May 1997.

(b) In broad terms, the development statement proposals provide for the following breakdown of land uses for the newly planned areas to be carried forward for testing by the feasibility studies being carried out by Project Manager/Kowloon:

Uses	Hectares
-----	-----
Commercial	26
Public Housing	44
Private Housing	102
Industrial	41
Government, Institutional, Community	84
Open Space	208
Roads/Other	70

	575

The above land use proposals would be adjusted in the light of the results of the feasibility studies.

(c) To implement the Metroplan Selected Strategy, new development areas proposed in the development statement are intended to provide "solution spaces" both to facilitate the restructuring of obsolete areas in Kowloon and also to help meet territorial land use needs for infrastructural provision. Of particular importance will be the reservation of sites for the rehousing of people affected by redevelopment schemes undertaken by such bodies as the Housing Authority, the Housing Society and the Land Development Corporation. In this connection, studies are being undertaken to quantify potential housing needs that could arise over the long term in the broad areas of Central-East Kowloon. Specific sites required for rehousing will be identified from the detailed studies now being undertaken by Project Manager/ Kowloon.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995

Pollutants discharged from dry cleaning

* * * * *

Following is a question by Dr the Hon John Tse Wing-ling and a written reply by the Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Mr Bowen Leung, in the Legislative Council today (Wednesday):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

(a) what are the pollutants discharged from the dry cleaning industry in the territory;

(b) whether these pollutants (e.g. tetrachloroethylene) have harmful effects on public health; if so, what measures the Government will take to safeguard the health of residents living near dry cleaning establishments and to ensure that they will not suffer from the steam and heat generated from these establishments;

(c) whether there are any established limits for occupational exposure to carcinogenic agents for the dry clean industry; if so, whether dry clean workers are considered vulnerable to known occupational diseases; and

(d) whether there are long-term plans and strategies in dealing with the hazardous air pollutants discharged from the dry cleaning industry; if so, what are the details?

Reply:

Mr President,

(a) Pollutants discharged from dry cleaning include 111-trichloroethane and perchloroethylene (tetrachloroethylene).

(b) 111-trichloroethane is not a carcinogen. Perchloroethylene has been classified as an animal carcinogen but there is no conclusive evidence of its carcinogenic effect on human beings. However, at high concentrations, both these chemicals may cause eye irritation and liver, kidney and neurological malfunctioning. The ambient levels of these chemicals in areas around dry cleaning establishments are nevertheless normally well below the World Health Organisation guidelines. If excessive emissions from these establishments cause environmental nuisance, an abatement notice can be issued under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance to require improvement. Enforcement action can also be taken against unpleasant steam and heat from the ventilation systems under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance but we have not received any complaint of this nature in the past few years.

(c) There are occupational exposure limits for the chemicals used by the dry cleaning industry, which have built in a wide safety margin to prevent possible health impacts. A recent sampling study on the dry cleaning industry has confirmed that the limits are adhered to. Good workplace practices such as adequate ventilation, wearing of protective equipment and proper hygiene habits can further minimize laundry workers' exposure to these chemicals. A health education booklet on solvents has been published to advise workers and proprietors on the proper use of these chemicals. In addition, Labour Department is preparing an occupational health leaflet on measures to prevent health hazards specifically for the laundry industry. According to 1994 statistics, there are no confirmed occupational diseases among workers in the dry cleaning industry.

(d) 111-trichloroethane is a controlled substance under the Ozone Layer Protection Ordinance. Its import will be banned from 1996. Perchloro-ethylene is one of the chemicals being considered in a preliminary study on toxic air pollutants. Subject to the findings of the study, which will be completed in late 1995, we shall consider the need for additional control measures, such as mandatory use of dry cleaning machines with closed systems and solvent recovery features.

End/Wednesday, November 22, 1995