

**立法會**  
***Legislative Council***

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**Legislative Council**  
**Panel on Economic Services**

**Minutes of special meeting held on**  
**Tuesday, 8 December 2000, at 4:30 pm**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, JP (Chairman)  
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP  
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP  
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon HUI Cheung-ching  
Hon SIN Chung-kai  
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP  
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP  
Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP  
Hon CHOY So-yuk  
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP  
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
- Non-Panel member attending** : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
- Members absent** : Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP  
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, JP  
Hon CHAN Kam-lam  
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong

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**Public officers attending**

: Economic Services Bureau

Mr Arthur HO  
Deputy Secretary for Economic Services

Mr Richard LUK  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Economic Services

Civil Aviation Department

Mr Albert Y K LAM  
Director of Civil Aviation

Mr Alex K Y AU  
Deputy Director of Civil Aviation

Mr Norman S M LO  
Air Traffic General Manager

**Attendance by invitation**

: United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority

Mr John DANCER  
Head of Air Traffic Services Standards Department

Mr Jeffrey DENNIS  
Regional Manager  
Air Traffic Services Regulation (Central)

Mr Robin BAKER  
Head of Air Traffic Services Licensing Policy

**Clerk in attendance**

: Mr Andy LAU  
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)2

**Staff in attendance**

: Ms Anita SIT  
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)8

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**I Briefing by the team of experts from the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority on the review of the air traffic control system in Hong Kong**

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Civil Aviation (DCA) said that as the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) at Chek Lap Kok had been in operation for over two years, the Administration considered it opportune to conduct a review on the air traffic control (ATC) operation at the HKIA to ensure that Hong Kong was well prepared for the increasing air traffic in future. Hence, the Civil Aviation Department (CAD) had commissioned the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority (UKCAA), which was the regulatory authority for all the air traffic services providers in the United Kingdom (UK), to review the ATC operation in Hong Kong. The three-member UKCAA expert team had arrived in Hong Kong on 4 December 2000 and was scheduled to depart on 9 December 2000. Well before their arrival in Hong Kong, CAD had already delivered relevant information on the ATC operation in Hong Kong to the experts for their preparation of the review.

2. Mr John DANCER, Head of Air Traffic Services Standards Department of UKCAA, said that he and his team members for the review had had direct involvement in the ATC operation in UK and possessed expertise in the safety regulatory aspects of air traffic operation. He then highlighted the following points in respect of the review on the ATC operation in Hong Kong -

- (a) The team had conducted the review in accordance with the practices and procedures that were employed for the auditing of ATC units in UK. For the current review, his team had had unimpeded access to all ATC facilities at the HKIA and had received high co-operation from the management and staff concerned. After conducting a four-day review, the team was of the view that the ATC operation in Hong Kong was safe and was of a high standard. It was also evident that airline operators using the HKIA were satisfied with the air traffic services provided by the ATC operation.
- (b) The team had reviewed the management and organization of CAD's Air Traffic Management Division (ATMD), the recruitment and training of the ATC personnel and the air traffic incidents (ATIs) reported at the HKIA. The team considered that there were areas of the ATC operation in Hong Kong which required continuing development to maintain a high level of safety in view of the increasing air traffic volume. As part of the improvement measures, the team recommended that CAD should make every effort to attract high calibre ATC personnel and equip them with appropriate training and support to meet future challenges. The team was confident that the management and staff of the ATC operation in Hong Kong had the necessary skills and enthusiasm to take forward any improvement/enhancement measures that the team would recommend in the detailed review report to be completed in about one month.

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- (c) The team noted that the reporting culture was well received by CAD and DCA required every significant incident to be reported and investigated. The team had reviewed all the ATIs reported at the HKIA and concluded that they mainly involved technical losses of standard separation which had posed no risk to safety. The team also concluded that there was no discernible pattern that would indicate problems with the competence of air traffic controllers or the safety of the ATC system.

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3. In reply to the Chairman's enquiry on whether the review report would be made public, the Deputy Secretary for Economic Services (DS/ES) said that the expert team had already made their conclusion clear that the ATC operation in Hong Kong was safe and of a high standard. They would however give suggestions for further improvement and enhancement. As the review report would probably include substantial technical details, it would be more appropriate for the Administration to report separately to the Panel taking into account members' concerns expressed at the meeting. Mr LAU Chin-shek was however of the view that the Administration should make public the entire review report as partial disclosure would inevitably give rise to suspicion that the Administration might be hiding some facts from the public.

4. Members sought the view of the expert team on the ATI rate at the HKIA in comparison with the international standard and with the past situation at Kai Tak in terms of number and severity. In response, Mr John DANCER said that while the team had yet to carry out a detailed analysis of the ATIs reported at the HKIA, based on the information gathered so far, the team considered that the ATI rate at HKIA compared favourably with other international airports of similar size and/or traffic level. He also advised that all the ATIs reported at the HKIA had not posed any risk of collision and were classified as ATIs involving the lowest safety risk according to the international ATI classification criteria.

5. As regards the comparison between the ATI rate at HKIA and that at Kai Tak, DCA said that the seemingly higher ATI rate at HKIA might be partly attributed to the more advanced surveillance system available at HKIA. Some ATIs that would not have been detected by the ATC operation at Kai Tak had thus been detected by the ATC operation at the HKIA. Mr LAU Chin-shek requested that a detailed comparison in terms of both number and severity between the ATIs reported at the old Kai Tak airport and those reported at the HKIA be included in the review report.

6. Referring to the improvement measures in respect of the organization and management, training, staff supervision and staff communication of the ATC operation in Hong Kong as set out in the paper on "Aviation Safety - Air Traffic Incidents" (CB(1)1630/99-00 presented to the Panel at the meeting on 22 May 2000), Mr Fred LI sought the expert team's view on the adequacy and effectiveness of the measures in ensuring the safety of the HKIA. In response, DCA confirmed that the aforesaid improvement measures were being implemented by CAD. He remarked that while the Department would continue to enhance the skills and expertise of its ATC

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personnel, ATIs involving human errors might still occur from time to time for various reasons. Mr John DANCER said that in the review report, the team would recommend certain changes to the organization and management of the ATMD of CAD as well as measures to enhance staff training, supervision and communication of the Division. He shared DCA's view that it was in recognition of the frailty of human beings in making mistakes that safeguarding systems were built into the ATC facilities and procedures, as well as the equipment carried in aircraft so as to ensure that any mistake made would not lead to serious consequences. Indeed, it was a common phenomenon among the ATC operations worldwide that human factors as opposed to system factors constituted the major causes of ATIs.

7. In reply to Miss CHOY So-yuk's enquiry on how far the ATC operation in Hong Kong could be further improved, Mr DANCER advised that it would be appropriate for the ATMD of CAD to focus on enhancing the existing ATC procedures and processes to ensure that air traffic controllers could continue to manage increasing air traffic while maintaining a high level of safety. He however remarked that he was not in a position to determine the magnitude of improvement which the ATMD should strive for.

8. Noting that 15 out of the 28 ATIs recorded during the period between the opening of the new airport and May 2000 were caused by inappropriate directions given by ATC personnel, Mr Henry WU enquired whether any common factor(s) had been identified in these 15 incidents. In reply, Mr John DANCER confirmed that his team did not find any discernible trend or common factor among the ATIs recorded at HKIA.

9. Mr LAU Chin-shek queried whether the ATC personnel, on transfer from Kai Tak to the HKIA, had been provided with adequate training to cope with the new ATC arrangements at the new airport, particularly those associated with the dual-runway operation. Mr John DANCER responded that his team was of the view that the conversion training provided for the ATC personnel of CAD had adequately equipped the ATC personnel with the necessary skills to manage the dual-runway operation at the HKIA.

10. Mr Howard YOUNG enquired whether the language ability of the ATC personnel at the HKIA was an impediment in any way to the safety of the airport operation. Mr John DANCER replied that his team had not detected any language problem in the communication between air traffic controllers and pilots and between local and expatriate air traffic controllers. The team also did not find language a specific factor in relation to the ATIs reported at HKIA.

11. In reply to Mr Fred LI's enquiry, Mr John DANCER confirmed that the hours of operation of the HKIA had no effect on the occurrence of the ATIs at the airport. The review team considered that there were sufficient ATC personnel and facilities to cater for the traffic at all times during the operating hours of the HKIA.

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12. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong enquired whether the ATIs reported at HKIA were caused by system problems or by incompetence of the ATC personnel. He also expressed concern about the possible serious consequence of the ATIs had such incidents not been timely rectified and asked whether the existing rectification mechanisms were adequate and reliable. He requested the expert team to address these issues in detail in their review report. Mr John DANCER replied that the ATIs reported at HKIA did not reveal a lack of expertise or unfamiliarity with the operation of the new airport among the ATC personnel. He also confirmed that the risk of collision in those ATIs was very small, if not nil, given the availability of the safeguarding systems carried in aircraft and those installed in the ATC facilities at the airport.

13. Mr Fred LI asked whether the ATC personnel involved in the ATIs caused by inappropriate directions could pass the relevant competence test after undergoing refresher training. DCA confirmed that all the ATI personnel concerned had undergone a tailor-made training programme to meet individual needs and thereafter had been tested and found suitable to resume the ATC-related duties.

14. Mr SIN Chung-kai pointed out that Hong Kong, as in the case of many Asian countries, was subject to inclement weather caused by typhoons during the year. In view of the crash of a Singapore Airlines plane in Taipei in late October 2000, he asked whether the current practice of keeping the HKIA open and leaving the decision entirely to the pilot-in-command as to whether to land or otherwise during adverse weather conditions was a prudent practice. He also enquired about the practices of other international airports in this regard.

15. In response, Mr John DANCER advised that it was not a practice in UK to close an airport simply because of adverse weather conditions. The consideration was that the pilot-in-command was in the best position to make the decision whether to land or take off his aircraft having regard to the rules and procedures laid down by the relevant airline and the prevailing conditions of the aerodrome as informed by the relevant ATC operation.

16. The Chairman said that as far as he understood, the airports in some places such as San Francisco, Chicago and Kennedy in the United States would close for a period of time when there was heavy snow or heavy fog. Mr John DANCER responded that as far as he understood, these airports in fact had continued to provide air traffic control services and therefore had not actually been closed. It had been however due to the need to clear the runways of snow resulting in the runways not being made available for flight operations for a period of time.

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17. In this regard, DS/ES informed members that the Administration had undertaken a review in late 1999 on whether the airport should be kept open during adverse weather conditions. Subsequently, the Administration had provided this Panel with an information paper setting out the findings and conclusion of the review. The Chairman requested that the paper be re-circulated to Panel members after the meeting.

*(Post-meeting note: The information paper on "Opening of airport during adverse weather conditions" provided by the Administration in June 2000 was re-circulated to members after the meeting vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1964/99-00(01).)*

18. Mrs Selina CHOW pointed out that while the expert team had concluded that the ATIs reported at HKIA had posed no risk of collision, the situation as conveyed by the media was very different and indeed had caused grave concern among the public about the safety of the new airport. She therefore queried whether the Administration had disseminated information on ATIs in an appropriate manner.

19. In response, DCA advised that while CAD adopted the policy of releasing relevant information on reported ATIs to the public, the information conveyed by the media was sometimes incomplete and this might have led to misapprehension by the public about the actual level of risk involved. He informed members that his enquiries with overseas aviation authorities revealed diverse practices on the disclosure of information about ATIs. For example, the United States Federal Aviation Administration issued monthly reports on ATIs, which amounted to a few hundred each month on average, for public information. The authority however would not explain each ATC incident in detail in those reports and normally would not entertain enquiries from the media on particular ATIs. Some Asian aviation authorities regarded statistics on ATIs as sensitive information and normally would not disclose them.

20. As regards the practice in UK, Mr John DANCER advised that the UKCAA aimed at timely dissemination of information about ATIs, and would provide information on the risk involved in individual incidents after preliminary inquiries. It was however beyond the Authority's control as to how the information was interpreted by the media and the public.

21. Mrs Selina CHOW urged the Administration to make timely clarification on any erroneous reports on ATIs as such reports would cause unnecessary alarm among the public about the safety of the HKIA.

22. The Chairman thanked the Administration, Mr John DANCER and his colleagues for attending the meeting.

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**II Any other business**

23. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:45 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat  
13 February 2001