

For information  
On 5 May 2003

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## **Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**

### **Malaysian Vessel with Sick Crew seeking to enter Hong Kong Waters**

#### **Purpose**

This note reports on the incident where a Malaysian vessel with some sick crew members on board requested to enter Hong Kong waters and the subsequent actions taken by the Hong Kong Government.

#### **Background**

2. The Marine Department received a call from a local shipping agent on May 2 afternoon seeking permission for a Malaysian-registered freighter “Bunga Melawis Satu” with some sick crew members on board to enter Hong Kong waters. It was reported that the freighter set off from Map Ta Put in Thailand on April 28, and was on its way from Thailand to Huangpu in Guangdong. The shipmaster sought assistance because 10 of its 24 crew members had fallen ill with symptoms of fever, cough and aching joints. The Marine Department asked the shipmaster to seek urgent medical treatment from the nearest port of call at Yangjiang or Gaolan, or to carry on with its journey to its original destination, Huangpu. However, the shipmaster made another request to come to Hong Kong.

3. Under the International Rescue and Search Convention and World Health Organisation regulations, the Hong Kong Government is obliged to come to the rescue of vessels in distress in the vicinity of Hong Kong waters. As a responsible member of the international community, the Government has decided to allow the vessel to enter Hong Kong waters. The vessel arrived in the morning on 4 May.

## **Government's Actions**

4. The authorities have taken a series of quarantine and precautionary measures to protect healthcare staff and others involved in the operation from being infected.

### *Order for designated anchorage*

5. The Director of Marine issued an order for the freighter to be anchored in a designated anchorage to the east of Kau Yi Chau so as to facilitate quarantine and isolation measures. The Malaysian freighter arrived in Hong Kong waters and was properly anchored in the morning on 4 May. The area was cordoned off by the Marine Police.

### *Treating Sick Crew Members at the Princess Margaret Hospital*

6. Port Health Officers, including three doctors and three nurses, boarded the vessel and conducted an examination of the crew. The 10 sick crewmen were found to be in a satisfactory condition and they were able to walk unaided. They did not display any signs of fever at the time when their temperatures were taken. However, as a precaution, the Port Health Officers decided that they should be admitted to Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) for further observation and investigation. These sick crew members were kept in a separate ward from local patients. All medical workers looking after the crew were also equipped with protective gear. As the sick crewmen are not Hong Kong residents, we have informed the shipping agent that it will have to pay the full cost of their medical treatment in Hong Kong.

7. The remaining crewmen were also found to be in a satisfactory condition. The Port Health officers then served legal instruments issued under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance (Cap. 141) on the sick crewmen and the Captain, requiring the former to be removed to a hospital and the latter to keep the rest of the crew on the ship.

### Cleansing and Disinfection

8. We have issued guidelines for disinfection to facilitate the local shipping agent to conduct a thorough disinfection of the vessel. Port Health Inspectors disinfected the key areas of the vessel such as toilets and kitchens. For the rest of the vessel, DH staff demonstrated to the crew how the thorough disinfection should be done and supervised the crew's work. All the vessels and ambulances being used to transport the sick crewmen were also thoroughly cleansed and disinfected.

### **Latest Situation**

9. Medical assessments showed that the 10 crew members transferred to PMH and the other 14 crew members remaining on board did not suffer SARS symptoms. They did not have fever and results of blood tests and chest X-rays were negative. They were discharged from the hospital and sent back to the vessel at night on 4 May. The quarantine order for all the remaining 14 crew members was also lifted. The vessel departed Hong Kong in the evening of 5 May.

10. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
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