

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)515/05-06

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 9 September 2005 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
- Members absent** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG
- Members attending** : Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon TAM Heung-man

**Public Officers : Item I
attending**

Mrs Pamela TAN
Director of Home Affairs

Mr Isaac CHOW
Deputy Director of Home Affairs (2)

Miss Victoria TANG
District Officer (Wong Tai Sin)
Home Affairs Department

Mr Lawrence CHEUNG
Assistant Director (Leisure Services)1
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mr Eugene FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security)1

Ms Grace CHAN
Chief Social Work Officer (Elderly)1
Social Welfare Department

Mrs CHANG LAM Sook-yee
Senior Social Work Officer (Elderly)4
Social Welfare Department

Mr Sydney FUNG
Deputy Regional Commander (Kowloon East)
Hong Kong Police Force

Mr Peter LAU
Superintendent (Field) (Support Branch)
Hong Kong Police Force

**Deputations : Item I
by invitation**

The Hong Kong Society For The Aged

Mr TIK Chi-yuen
Executive Director

Ms LAM Kam-lee
Senior Manager (Quality and Research)

Federation of Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community
Organizations

Mr CHOI Hin-to
Chairman

Mr CHOI Ping
Secretary

Chi Tak Sha Association Ltd.

Mr KWOK Ka-yim
General Director

Miss WONG Wing-shan
Secretary

Buddhist Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-Lan Charitable Association Ltd

Mr CHAN Wan-yin
Director

The Against Elderly Abuse of Hong Kong

Miss Carol KWONG Man-wah
President

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Jane TSUEI
Business Director (Service Development)

尖沙咀福德古廟有限公司

Mr MA Chung-sum
Hon Chairman

Mr MA Ting-chiu
Chairman

Cheung Sha Wan Chiu Chow Merchants for Yu Lan Festival
Fraternity Association Limited

Mr CHENG Pik-muk
Chairman

九龍城潮僑孟蘭會有限公司

Mr NG Lee-chung
Chairman

Tsuen Wan Chiu Kiu Kaifong Yu Lan Association Limited

Mr SIU Shing-chui
Director

Tsui Ping Chau Chow Kai Yee Lun Club

Mr CHUNG Hoi-tim
Supervisor

Clerk in attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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Switching the joint meeting to a special meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services

Members noted that 10 Members were required to form a quorum for the joint meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Home Affairs. As a quorum for the joint meeting was not present within 15 minutes of the time appointed for the meeting, members decided that the meeting should be held as a special meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services.

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I. Rice distribution activities and related issues

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2551/04-05(01) to (03) and CB(2)2569/04-05(01) to (03))

Meeting with deputations

The Hong Kong Society for the Aged
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2551/04-05(02))

2. Mr TIK Chi-yuen presented the views of the Hong Kong Society for the Aged (the Society) as detailed in its submission. He urged the Home Affairs Department (HAD) to enhance the implementation of crowd control and other supporting measures during rice distribution events to ensure the safety of the elderly people. He further said that the organisers of these events should collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to mobilise volunteers to deliver the rice to the elderly people at their homes or distribute rice coupons to the elderly people so that they could collect the rice at nearby supermarkets or community halls, in order to obviate the need for them to queue up overnight.

Federation of Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community Organizations

3. Mr CHOI Hin-to said that Yu Lan Festival was a traditional festival and the distribution of “Blessed Rice” also had a long history. He added that the Federation of Hong Kong Chiu Chow Community Organizations had tried its best in its coordination of rice distribution events held by various Chiu Chow community groups.

Chi Tak Sha Association Ltd.
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2569/04-05(03))

4. Mr KWOK Ka-yim presented the views of the Chi Tak Sha Association Ltd as detailed in its submission. He urged the Administration and the organisers of rice distribution events to improve crowd control measures during these events to avoid congregation of large crowds. He suggested that participants aged over 65 years should be registered in advance, and arrangements should be made for volunteers should be arranged to deliver the “Blessed Rice” to these pre-registered elderly. In addition, consideration should be given to distributing rice at multiple locations using a rice coupon system. Mr KWOK added that only small rice packets should be distributed during rice distribution events to avoid causing injuries to the elderly people.

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*Buddhist Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-Lan Charitable Association Ltd
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2577/04-05(02))*

5. Mr CHAN Wan-yin presented the views of the Buddhist Sam Kok Mar Tou Yu-Lan Charitable Association Ltd as detailed in its submission. He considered that the Police should not allow the number of participants in a rice distribution event to exceed the capacity of the venue concerned and they should control admission by way of a “chips allotment” system. He suggested that all participants should be divided into three groups, i.e. elderly people with a disability or health problems, the elderly and young participants, and distribution of the “Blessed Rice” should be conducted in this order. In addition, the organisers of these events should provide each participant with drinking water and bread during the events, and arrange auxiliary medical service teams to stand by.

*Against Elderly Abuse of Hong Kong
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2551/04-05(03))*

6. Miss Carol KWONG presented the views of the Against Elderly Abuse of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. She said that in order to save the elderly people from lining up overnight, NGOs and the Housing Department should assist in giving chips to the elderly people in the targeted districts before rice distribution events. The elderly people concerned could then collect the rice at staggered collection time. In addition, the organisers should make it clear that no more chips would be given out during the events in order to prevent chaos. In addition, volunteers should stand by during the events to help any elderly people who were unable to carry the rice packets. Miss KWONG added that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), in processing applications for hire of LCSD venues to hold rice distribution events, should consider requiring the organisers concerned to adopt the above chips allotment arrangements on a mandatory basis.

*The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2569/04-05(01))*

7. Ms Jane TSUEI presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) as detailed in its submission. She said that the organisers of rice distribution events should consider measures which would obviate the need for the elderly to line up outdoor or overnight. She suggested that the organisers should solicit help from voluntary groups to distribute the rice packets to the elderly people, especially those who lived alone and those in poverty. She added that HKCSS was willing to assist in the coordination between the Administration/the organisers of rice distribution events and voluntary groups in organising such events.

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Tsui Ping Chau Chow Kai Yee Lun Club

8. Mr CHUNG Hoi-tim said that his organisation had all along managed to maintain good order during rice distribution events. He considered that it would be impracticable to require the organisers of these events to arrange delivery of the “Blessed Rice” to the homes of the elderly people given the large elderly population in Hong Kong.

尖沙咀福德古廟有限公司
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2656/04-05(01))

9. Mr MA Chung-sum and Mr MA Ting-chiu said that they had provided a submission and had no further comments to make.

Cheung Sha Wan Chiu Chow Merchants for Yu Lan Festival Fraternity Association Limited
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2577/04-05(01))

10. Mr CHENG Pik-muk presented the views of the Cheung Sha Wan Chiu Chow Merchants for Yu Lan Festival Fraternity Association Limited as detailed in its submission. He said that it was important to ensure that there was good air ventilation during a rice distribution event. He suggested that the organisers distributing “Blessed Rice” should convene meetings with the Police and HAD prior to these events to discuss the logistical arrangements and measures to ensure the smooth implementation of the programme.

Tsuen Wan Chiu Kiu Kaifong Yu Lan Association Limited
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2656/04-05(02))

11. Mr SIU Shing-chui presented the views of Tsuen Wan Chiu Kiu Kaifong Yu Lan Association Limited as detailed in its submission. He said that the distribution of “Blessed Rice” during the Yu Lan Festival was a tradition that should be maintained. He further said that it was important to divide the participants of such events into batches with the old aged and those with a disability to be given rice first. He said that drinking water and washrooms should be provided. He further suggested that since rice distribution events were held during the summer vacation, consideration could be given to making use of school campuses as the venues for holding these events.

九龍城潮僑孟蘭會有限公司

12. Mr NG Lee-chung said that since the participants of rice distribution events were predominantly the elderly people, chaotic situations would easily occur even

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though the organisers had already taken measures to ensure the safety of the elderly people. He added that his organisation would continue to discuss with the Administration to explore feasible measures to make improvements.

Other submission received

(LC Paper No. CB(2)2569/04-05(02))

13. Members noted that the Hong Kong Social Workers Association had also provided a submission for members' reference.

Videotape provided by the Deputy Chairman

14. The Chairman said that she would let a video about the chaotic situations during recent rice distribution events to be shown before the Administration would be asked to respond.

(Showing of video for five minutes)

Discussion

15. Director of Home Affairs (DHA) said that the Administration was very concerned about the recent incidents that had occurred in rice distribution events during the Yu Lan Festival where many elderly people had to queue up for a long time. She informed members that on 5 September 2005, the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA) and Departments concerned had held a meeting with the organisers. They had generally reached a consensus that the distribution of "Blessed Rice" during the Yu Lan Festival should continue but there was a need for the mode of operation to be enhanced. It was also agreed that the primary principle to be observed in organising these events was that the safety of the elderly participants had to be ensured. DHA further said that both the Administration and the organisers were of the view that effective measures had to be taken to prevent the congregation of large crowds and to obviate the need for the elderly to queue up overnight or outdoor.

16. DHA pointed out that at the meeting on 5 September, some of the organisers were encouraged to adopt some measures already implemented by other organisers in distributing "Blessed Rice". Such measures included -

- (a) registering the names of the elderly people in advance and reserving sufficient rice packets for these pre-registered elderly to collect during the events, so that they would not have to queue up overnight or push one another during the events in fighting for a better position; and

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- (b) distributing only small rice packets to avoid causing injuries to the elderly people.

17. The Deputy Chairman said that he respected the traditional custom of distributing “Blessed Rice” during the Yu Lan Festival. He, however, also considered that the organisers of these events had to work out new arrangements to ensure the safety of the elderly people. He pointed out that actually many elderly people had sustained injuries during these events. He asked what measures the Administration would introduce to ensure the safety of the elderly people during rice distribution events as 70% of such events were held at Government venues, and whether the same measures could be implemented in those which were held on private premises, e.g. temples.

18. DHA responded that in handling applications for hiring Government venues to hold rice distribution events, the Administration could discuss with the organisers concerned the adoption of certain additional measures to ensure the safety of the elderly as part of the terms and conditions of hiring the venues. She said that as to those events which were not held at Government venues, the Administration could also discuss the proper arrangements with regard to manpower, size and quantity of rice packets to be distributed, and the provision of queuing areas, etc. with the organisers concerned. DHA reiterated that the Administration would continue to discuss with the organisers holding the Yu Lan Festival events as well as the social welfare sector to actively explore improvement measures and work out new arrangements as soon as possible.

19. Dr KWOK Ka-ki expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration’s failure to provide any concrete details of improvements to be made to the rice distribution events. He considered that the organisers of these events should have been able to prevent the recurrence of chaotic situations during these events since they had already accumulated quite a lot of experience in organising the events. He suggested that consideration should be given to using rice coupons and distributing only small rice packets during these events.

20. DHA responded that over the years, with the concerted efforts made by various Departments concerned and the organisers in improving the logistical arrangements and safety measures for rice distribution events, gradual improvements had been made in their implementation. She said that due to improvement in telecommunication and the ageing population, the number of people queuing up for the “Blessed Rice” during the Yu Lan Festival had been on the increase. She pointed out that it had become a popular trend for the elderly people from various districts to participate in a rice distribution event. She said that the Administration had come to a view that improvement measures, which should focus on preventing the recurrence of chaotic situations, in particular, the congregation of large crowds during the distribution of “Blessed Rice”, had to be

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worked out.

21. Mr CHAN Wan-yin and Mr KWOK Ka-yim both considered that the chaotic situations in the rice distribution events as shown in the video had been caused by the congregation of large crowds without timely measures implemented to divert the crowds. They suggested that the organisers should recruit sufficient volunteers to provide additional support and establish close communication with the Police to maintain law and order during the events.

22. Miss TAM Heung-man said that while the Administration had responded expeditiously in addressing the crowd management problem recently found in the Disneyland, it had responded slowly to the recent incidents occurred at the rice distribution events during the Yu Lan Festival. She expressed disappointment that the Administration had started to review the implementation of these events only after an elderly person had died in such an event recently, and that the Administration still had not worked out any monitoring measures for the activities and programme implemented by charitable organisations. She queried what the Administration had done in the past in this regard and whether any guidelines had been issued to the organisers regarding, for example, the appropriate venues for holding rice distribution events and the proper arrangements in relation to crowd management.

23. DHA responded that over the years, the Administration had played an active role to facilitate the smooth implementation of the rice distribution events. She said that the Departments concerned would discuss the logistical arrangements and safety measures prior to the events to ensure smooth implementation of the programme. She pointed out that the relevant Departments would remind the organisers to carefully plan and manage the entire programme with particular regard to, for example, the provision of sufficient queuing areas, canopies and drinking water, the necessary manpower, and the need to avoid requiring participants to queue up for a long time, etc.

24. DHA further said that the Administration considered it necessary to reduce the number of participants in future rice distribution events, by reducing the attractiveness of such events, such as by reducing the quantity and size of rice packets to be distributed and ceasing the distribution of “Lai See” during these events. She reiterated that soon after 2 September 2005, SHA had convened an inter-department meeting to discuss feasible measures to improve the current arrangements. Moreover, in order to avoid the recurrence of chaotic situations in subsequent rice distribution events on 3 and 4 September, the District Offices and the Police had provided additional support and it was noted that these events had taken place smoothly.

25. Mr NG Lee-chung, Mr CHUNG Hoi-tim and Mr CHENG Pik-muk said

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that prior to a rice distribution event, District Offices and other relevant Departments would hold meetings with the organisers to discuss the logistical arrangements and safety measures to be taken during the events. They said that the Administration had always reminded them of the need for careful planning and they disagreed that the Administration had done nothing in the past to ensure the smooth implementation of these events. Mr CHUNG and Mr CHENG added that the death of the elderly on 2 September had nothing to do with the chaos that had occurred during the rice distribution event because she had collapsed before reaching the queue for the “Blessed Rice”. Mr CHENG pointed out that chaos had been found in only three rice distribution events this year and he believed that improvements could be worked out. He further suggested that political parties should also mobilise their members to help maintain order during these events.

26. Mr Albert CHAN said that the attitude of the Administration was that it would not see the need to make any improvements until fatal accidents had occurred. He requested the Police to explain its criteria for approving applications for holding rice distribution events and whether it would ensure that there would be sufficient Police manpower to maintain law and order during these events. He queried why the Police always deployed a lot of manpower in handling political demonstrations, even when only a very small number of demonstrators were involved, but did not provide sufficient manpower for handling of rice distribution events despite the recurrence of chaos during these events.

27. Deputy Regional Commander (Kowloon East) said that during rice distribution events, the frontline police officers would carefully assess the situation in deciding on the most effective ways for crowd control. He pointed out that actually there was no need for the organisers of rice distribution events to notify the Police or apply for the No Objection Letter because these events were just religious events. The Police maintained order during these events by cooperating with the organisers and maintaining close liaison with them. He pointed out that public processions were different as they could impact on public order. Mr Albert CHAN requested the Police to provide information on the number of injuries that had occurred in rice distribution events in the past few years.

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28. Mr CHAN Wan-yin considered that the problem with the events shown in the video had to do with inadequate volunteers to maintain order. He suggested that the organisers should recruit sufficient volunteers to provide support.

29. Ms LAM Kam-lee said that speaking from her experience of organising activities for the elderly, considerable manpower planning and risk assessments had to be conducted in organising an activity even though it only involved about 200 elderly people. She said that it was difficult to imagine how the organisers

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of rice distribution events could cope with crowd control during such an event when it involved congregation of a few thousand elderly people. She also cited a newspaper article which had pointed out that 20% of the elderly people were suffering from depression and given their physical constraints, they would not be able to cope when chaos arose during rice distribution events and they would also not be able to follow the advice of the Police. Miss LAM further said that the chaotic situations during rice distribution events had arisen not because their organisers had not done anything but it was because the safety measures taken did not work. She considered that there was a need for the Administration and the organisers to review and revise the existing mode of operation of these events.

30. Mr Alan LEONG asked for the deputations' views on the arrangements suggested by Mr KWOK Ka-yim of Chi Tak Sha Association Ltd., i.e. distributing only small rice packets during rice distribution events and arranging the elderly people to collect rice at nearby supermarkets using a rice coupon system. Mr SIU Shing-chui said that while he was willing to consider any feasible improvement measures, he was concerned that the rice in supermarkets was not "Blessed Rice" which had gone through the religious process. He suggested that in order to ensure the safety of the elderly people, the organisers of rice distribution events should separate the elderly from the young participants and distribute rice to the elderly people, especially the weak ones, first. He said that the organisers could also consider allocating a certain portion of "Blessed Rice" to NGOs for distribution to the elderly people who lived alone. He also informed the meeting that some of these organisers took out insurance for the rice distribution events organised by them.

31. Mr Fred LI said that he supported the improvement measures suggested by DHA above but was concerned whether the measures could really be implemented. He said that since rice distribution events were held in the summer every year, measures should be taken to obviate the need for the elderly people to line up outdoor. He agreed that it was most important to devise effective measures for crowd control management during these events and that the organisers should not give out cash during the events to avoid attracting too many elderly people to participate. He also considered that there was no need to distribute large packets of "Blessed Rice" because he believed that the blessing was there even if the elderly people were given only a small packet of the "Blessed Rice". He added that as there were only about 60 organisers of rice distribution events, he hoped that the Administration would be able to reach a consensus with them on the improvement measures.

32. DHA responded that the Administration had already reached a consensus with the organisers that improvements would be introduced to the rice distribution events to be held next year to ensure their smooth implementation and the safety of the elderly people. She reiterated that the target would be to prevent

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congregation of large crowds during these events in order to avoid giving rise to chaos. She said that if the number of participants could be reduced in the future, consideration could be given to using community halls as the venues for these events. She pointed out that at present as most of the rice distribution events were attended by lots of participants, community halls were not used due to their limited capacity. Nevertheless, the Administration also made available the community halls for the participants to rest in the course of these events.

33. The Chairman said that the recent incidents that had occurred during rice distribution events had aroused wide public concern and she agreed that there was a need to make improvements to ensure the safety of the elderly people. She also considered it necessary for the Administration to issue detailed guidelines for holding rice distribution events to the organisers for their reference. She called on the organisers to approach welfare organisations, such as HKCSS and Against Elderly Abuse of Hong Kong, for assistance and support in organising these events.

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34. As proposed by the Chairman, the Panel agreed that the Panel on Home Affairs should follow up this issue since HAD assumed the coordinating role in working out the improvement measures. The Panel also agreed that the Administration should report the improvement measures to the Panel on Home Affairs by the end of 2005. DHA responded that it was also the Administration's target to work out the improvement measures as soon as possible so that the organisers could have sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements. The Chairman said that the confirmed minutes of this meeting should be provided to the deputations for their reference.

35. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:55 pm.