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seen by the Administration)

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

**Minutes of Special Meeting held on**  
**Tuesday, 31 August 1999, at 2:30 pm**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon David CHU Yu-lin  
Hon LEE Wing-tat  
Hon MA Fung-kwok  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon Ambrose CHEUNG Wing-sum, JP  
Hon HUI Cheung-ching  
Hon CHAN Yuen-han  
Hon CHAN Kam-lam  
Hon SIN Chung-kai  
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong  
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP  
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo

**Member attending** : Hon HO Sai-chu, SBS, JP  
Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP  
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP  
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP  
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP  
Hon Margaret NG  
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP  
Hon James TO Kun-sun  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon CHOY So-yuk

**Members absent** : Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, JP (Chairman)  
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP  
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP  
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, JP

Hon Christine LOH  
Hon Bernard CHAN  
Hon WONG Yung-kan  
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP  
Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP  
Hon FUNG Chi-kin

**Public officers  
attending**

: For Agenda Item I

Ms Maria S N KWAN  
Acting Secretary for Economic Services

Mr Arthur K W HO  
Deputy Secretary for Economic Services

Mr Alan Y K LO  
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary for Economic  
Services (New Airport)

Mrs Regina S Y IP  
Secretary for Security

Mr John S L NG  
Government Security Officer

Mr Alex K Y AU  
Acting Director of Civil Aviation

Mr Norman S M LO  
Assistant Director of Civil Aviation  
(Flight Standards)

Dr H K LAM  
Director of the Hong Kong Observatory

Mr K H YEUNG  
Assistant Director of the Hong Kong Observatory  
(Aviation Meteorological Services Branch)

Mr TSANG Kwong-yu  
Director of Fire Services

Mr K P HSU  
Deputy Director of Fire Services

Mr M L LEE  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (NT/S)

**Attendance by invitation** : For Agenda Item I

Airport Authority

Mr Billy C L LAM  
Chief Executive Officer

Mr Richard A SIEGEL  
Management and Operations Adviser

Mr Howard ENG  
Acting Airport Management Director

Hospital Authority

Dr S H LIU  
Senior Executive Manager (Professional Services),  
Hospital Authority

China Airlines

Mr YEH Yow Ching  
Acting Director, Flight Safety Office

Mr David FEI  
General Manager - Hong Kong Branch

**Clerk in attendance** : Ms Estella CHAN  
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)4

**Staff in attendance** : Ms Pauline NG  
Assistant Secretary General 1

Miss Anita HO  
Assistant Legal Adviser 2

Mr Daniel HUI  
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)5

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**I Briefing on the aircraft accident of 22 August 1999 at the Hong Kong International Airport**

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1835/98-99(01) - Information paper provided by the Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)1835/98-99(02) - List of questions prepared by Hon Fred LI Wah-ming)

The Deputy Chairman informed members that the special meeting was convened with the concurrence of the Chairman in accordance with Rule 77(11) of the Rules of Procedure of the Legislative Council. He would chair the meeting on behalf of the Chairman who was not in Hong Kong at the moment.

Firefighting and rescue operations

2. At the Deputy Chairman's invitation, the Director of Fire Services (DFS) briefed members about the on-site firefighting and rescue operations on the day of the aircraft accident at the Hong Kong International Airport as set out in Annex A of the information paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(1)1835/98-99(01)).

3. Members commended the efficiency and professionalism of all those involved in the firefighting and rescue operations after the accident. Mr HO Sing-tin noted that the first ambulance conveying injured persons from the crash scene arrived at the Princess Margaret Hospital at about one hour after the occurrence of the accident. He asked whether there were other faster means, such as by helicopter, to convey those seriously injured to hospitals if necessary. DFS advised that there were means to convey the injured persons to hospitals by helicopters if necessary, but this option was not appropriate for the situation concerned because helicopters could not land anywhere near the aircraft wreckage because of the danger of catching fire. Consequently, if helicopters had to be used, the injured had to be conveyed to the nearby helicopter pad before being transferred to hospitals, which might cause a longer delay. Hence, medical teams were despatched to the accident site to conduct triage and provide treatment to victims requiring immediate medical treatment. Those casualties requiring urgent hospitalization would be conveyed to hospitals in the first instance. DFS emphasized that the rescue measure had proved effective.

4. Miss CHOY So-yuk pointed out that the lack of a hospital in north Lantau Island could seriously hinder rescue operation if the Tsing Ma Bridge had to be closed for some reasons. She enquired whether there was any plan to build a hospital in north Lantau Island. In response, the Secretary for Security (S for S) advised that the Health and Welfare Bureau had planned to build a hospital in north Lantau Island when the population in the district reached 200,000. Current estimate was that the hospital should be available by about

year 2006. S for S further advised that rescue operations would not be affected by the existence or otherwise of a hospital in north Lantau because in any case where a large number of casualties was involved, the injured persons would have to be conveyed to different hospitals to make use of all the available emergency services. She emphasized that under the Contingency Plan for Dealing with an Aircraft Crash in Hong Kong, sufficient medical staff and support services would be despatched to the accident site to conduct rescue operations. She also pointed out that the lower deck of the Tsing Ma Bridge was open for traffic on the night of the accident and that if necessary, the injured persons could be conveyed to hospitals by helicopters.

5. In reply to Mr LEE Wing-tat's question on whether the Airport Authority (AA) was prepared to set up a mini-hospital at the airport with adequate medical supply and an operation theatre for the provision of urgent medical treatment in case of aircraft accidents, Mr Billy LAM advised that AA would be willing to provide space for a mini-hospital if the Government decided to build one in the airport. He added that currently AA had stocks of some medical supplies which had been utilized for the treatment of injured persons after the aircraft accident. On that night, AA had transformed the South APV Lounge into a reception centre for processing of non-hospitalized passengers. Dr S H LIU of Hospital Authority supplemented that in the case of an accident with large number of casualties, the most important thing was for the diversion of injured persons to different hospitals. A mini-hospital at the airport could hardly cope with the demand for emergency medical services arising from a serious accident.

6. The Deputy Chairman noted that there were only two ambulances stationing at the airport, while a total of 57 ambulances were despatched to the airport after the aircraft accident. He asked the Administration to review whether the number of ambulances stationing at the airport was adequate. In response, DFS advised that in addition to the two ambulances stationed at the airport, there were six ambulances in Tung Chung which could be deployed in emergencies. He supplemented that the arrangement of having two ambulances stationed at the airport had taken into account the need to maximize the utilization of resources and efficiency of operation during emergencies.

#### Airport operation on the day of the accident

7. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong questioned the appropriateness of relying on pilots' own judgement in deciding whether to land at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) even when typhoon signal number 9 or 10 was hoisted. He also enquired whether the Civil Aviation Department (CAD) would provide any information to other airports regarding continued operation of HKIA if typhoon signal number 9 or 10 was hoisted in Hong Kong. The Director of Civil Aviation (Acting) (DCA(Atg)) responded that the arrangement for HKIA to be kept open during typhoons was in accordance with Annex 6 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation which provided that

subject to their published conditions of use, airports and their facilities should be kept continuously available for flight operations during their published hours of operation irrespective of the weather conditions. CAD would provide all relevant weather information to pilots who should determine if the prevailing conditions were suitable for safe landing or take-off. He emphasized that pilots had received training with regard to landing and take-off under different weather conditions and it was in line with international practice for pilots who have control of the aircraft to make their own decisions on whether to land or take-off. As regards notifications to overseas airports on typhoon information in Hong Kong, DCA(Atg) advised that such notifications were made in order to draw to the attention of overseas air traffic control authorities on the possibility of serious air traffic delay in Hong Kong due to adverse weather conditions.

8. In reply to Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong's question on provision of information relating to cross-wind to pilots attempting to land or take-off at HKIA, DCA(Atg) advised that CAD would provide all necessary weather information including wind speed and direction to pilots according to the standard requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The information on cross-wind was not required and CAD would have to consult ICAO on making available the cross-wind information to pilots.

9. Mr James TO Kun-sun noted that under Annex 6 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the continuous operation of airports irrespective of weather conditions was subject to the conditions of use published by local civil aviation authorities. He enquired whether the published conditions of use of HKIA included any condition on restricted use at times of adverse weather and if not, whether CAD considered it appropriate to include such a condition in HKIA's conditions of use. DCA(Atg) replied that the conditions of use of HKIA concerned some general conditions such as restrictions on noise level and the types of aircraft that could make use of the airport and there was no provision relating to weather conditions. He reiterated that it was appropriate and in line with international practice in allowing pilots to make decisions on landing and take-off and CAD's responsibility was to ensure provision of up-to-date weather information to pilots.

10. Mr Howard YOUNG enquired about the reasons for closure of the airport for six hours even though the North Runway was not affected by the accident which occurred at the South Runway. He opined that CAD should avoid the closure of the airport for excessive period of time in order to avoid unnecessary flight delays causing a lot of passengers stranded at the passenger terminal building. DCA(Atg) noted Mr YOUNG's view and explained that the six hour closure was necessary as a large number of rescue and support personnel and vehicles had been deployed in the vicinity of the crash site, there would be safety concerns if aircraft movements were to take place on the North Runway.

11. Ms Margaret NG asked whether AA had made a public announcement in the first instance in the passenger terminal building about the occurrence of the aircraft accident. She suggested that AA should review its procedure in this respect if the relevant announcements had not been made promptly on this occasion. In response, Mr Billy LAM advised that the first announcement on the aircraft accident, which occurred at around 6:45 pm, was made through the public address system in the passenger terminal building at about 8:00 pm and subsequent announcements were made at 30 minutes intervals. He supplemented that reports on the accident had been broadcast by the mass media including the radio and the television well before 8:00 pm on that night. Moreover, airline staff at service counters in the passenger terminal building had also informed the passengers of the aircraft accident. Nevertheless, he agreed to examine the need for improvement on the procedures for making public announcements on emergencies at the airport.

12. As regards the reasons for reduced number of inbound flights in the morning on 23 August 1999 after the occurrence of the accident, DCA(Atg) advised that the flight delays or cancellations in that morning were due to adverse weather conditions.

13. On deployment of vehicles within the airport for transport of affected persons, Mr Billy LAM confirmed that airport vehicles had been deployed to convey uninjured or slightly injured passengers from the runway to the South APV Lounge and subsequently some were also transported to the Airport Hotel.

#### Wind conditions at the airport

14. Dr Raymond HO Chung-tai enquired about the respective windshear risks at the Chek Lap Kok(CLK) and Kai Tak airports and whether any information on windshear warnings were provided to pilots. The Director of Hong Kong Observatory (D/HKO) advised that studies by experts had indicated that the rates of occurrence of windshear at CLK and that at Kai Tak were comparable and were in the order of around 0.5% of the time. In the first year of operation of the airport at CLK, the HKO warning system had issued warnings of windshear for 0.32% of the time. DCA(Atg) supplemented that HKO warnings of windshear were displayed instantaneously in CAD's air traffic control tower. Any information on windshear would be passed to pilots through air traffic control.

15. As to whether the wind conditions at CLK would affect its suitability as the site of an international airport, the Secretary for Economic Services (Acting) (SES(Atg)) pointed out that paragraphs 11-19 of the information paper provided by the Administration had provided detailed information in this respect and studies by experts concluded that CLK was operationally viable as a major international airport.

16. In reply to Ms Emily LAU's question on whether airlines or pilots had complained about the occurrence of windshear at CLK since its opening last year and whether HKO's warning system had proved effective, D/HKO advised that the Windshear and Turbulence Warning System (WTWS) installed at CLK used the latest available technologies and the system helped to detect low level windshear and turbulence around the airport. In order to ascertain the effectiveness of this system, airlines had been requested to provide reports on occurrence of windshear to HKO for comparison with the warnings issued by the WTWS. For the first year of operation, 162 aircraft pilot reports of windshear were received by HKO. D/HKO further advised that while WTWS had been able to give warnings on some but not all of these 162 reported occurrences of windshear, HKO would examine each of the reported cases with a view to improving the effectiveness of WTWS.

17. Addressing Mr Howard YOUNG's concern about whether the differences between the geographical characteristics of the CLK airport and those of the airports in the United States of America would have affected the performance of the Terminal Doppler Weather Radar (TDWR) of the WTWS, D/HKO advised that the manufacturer of the TDWR had conducted an on-site optimization process in Hong Kong before delivery of the system and as such the specific geographical characteristics of CLK airport had been taken into account in designing the operation system of TDWR. He reiterated that the performance of TDWR had been consistently good since the opening of the airport.

18. Mr Howard YOUNG noted that some aircraft had installed windshear detecting equipment to enhance safety and enquired whether CAD would consider requiring compulsory installation of such equipment on aircraft. DCA(Atg) advised that the windshear detecting system on aircraft would provide some supplementary information to pilots but there was currently no plan to require aircraft to install such equipment. In this regard, Mr YEH Yow-ching of China Airlines informed the Panel that all China Airlines' aircraft had installed the windshear detecting system.

19. Mr CHAN Kam-lam enquired whether wind speeds and directions prevailing over the South Runway and North Runway were different, and if so, whether information on wind conditions prevailing on both Runways was provided to aircraft pilots. DCA(Atg) confirmed that the two runways were at 1500 metres apart and the wind conditions over the runways were different and the respective wind information was provided to pilots. On the day when the accident happened most pilots had chosen the South Runway for landing. The Assistant Director of Civil Aviation (AD/CA) supplemented that most aircraft had been installed with advanced navigational equipment which could provide wind direction and wind speed information to pilots to assist their landing decisions. The wind information was on continuous display to the pilots.

### Response by China Airlines on flight safety

20. In reply to Ms Emily LAU's questions on measures being taken by China Airlines to improve the safety of its flight operation, Mr YEH Yow-ching advised that subsequent to previous aircraft accidents involving China Airlines' aircraft, the company had engaged experts from Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines to examine the causes relating to the accidents and to recommend on measures to be taken by China Airlines to improve the safety of its flight operation. Although the recommendations were not yet available, China Airlines had enhanced its training on staff with regard to flight operation safety and had raised its internal requirement on conditions under which aircraft movements were allowed to take place.

### Accident Investigation

21. As regards membership of the accident investigation team, Mr Andrew CHENG Kar-fu enquired whether experts on the effect of windshear on aircraft operation and experts who had advised against choosing CLK as the location for the new airport would be appointed as members of the investigation team. He also expressed concern about difficulties in conducting the investigation if the pilot of the crashed aircraft was allowed to leave Hong Kong. In response, DCA(Atg) advised that the investigation team would adopt an open attitude towards the investigation and would invite views from any useful source, including experts on windshear or airport design, to assist in its investigation work. AD/CA supplemented that an Inspector's Investigation into the accident was being carried out under the Hong Kong Civil Aviation (Investigation of Accidents) Regulations. The aim of the investigation was to find out the causes of the accident and make recommendations to prevent future recurrence. The investigation team comprised of nine members who were trained aircraft accident investigators of CAD. The team would be assisted by nine aviation experts from the United States of America including three from Boeing Commercial Airplane Group which was the manufacturer of the accident aircraft. Moreover, 15 experts from Taiwan's Civil Aviation Authority and Aviation Safety Council, and China Airlines would also be invited to assist in the investigation. As regards the arrangement for the aircraft pilot to give evidence to the investigation team, AD/CA advised that the team could request the pilot through China Airlines to provide further evidence if necessary. Hitherto, the pilot concerned had been co-operative and provided the required information to CAD. CAD did not see the need to require the pilot to remain in Hong Kong.

22. Referring to paragraph 22 of the information paper provided by the Administration, Ms Emily LAU asked whether the preliminary report on the investigation to be published in September 1999 would be communicated to the general public if the findings involved issues of public safety. DCA(Atg) advised that the preliminary report would mainly cover factual information of

the accident and any significant finding that concerned public safety would be communicated to the general public in the first instance.

23. In response to Mr James TO's question, AD/CA remarked that if the Chief Executive had decided to publish the final report of the Investigation Team, it would be put on sale at the Government Publications Sales Office. A copy of the final report would be provided to those departments, organisations and individuals who had assisted in the course of the investigation.

24. As regards whether CAD would be required to seek the agreement of China Airlines before publication of the final report, AD/CA said that a draft final report would be sent to all parties concerned including China Airlines for comments. Proposed amendments to the draft final report, if accepted by the investigation team, would be incorporated into the final report. Any proposed amendments not accepted by the team would be included as an appendix to the final report.

25. On whether claims for damage by the passengers and AA on China Airlines could only be submitted after issue of the final report, DCA(Atg) advised that claims for damage by the passengers on China Airlines were governed by the conditions of carriage printed at the back of the air tickets and these claims could be submitted any time and were not related to the investigation of the accident. As regards claims by AA on China Airlines in respect of the charges for repairing the Runway and removal of the aircraft wreckage, Mr Billy LAM confirmed that such claims would be submitted when the relevant charges were known.

#### Other issues

26. Mr Martin LEE Chu-ming and Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee pointed out that reports on the aircraft accident in the overseas media seemed to have presented a negative image of HKIA, and there was only limited reporting on the efficient rescue operations. They suggested that the Administration should ensure better co-ordinated dissemination of information to foreign press on events of interest to the international community. SES(Atg) remarked that the Government Information Service had been co-ordinating the issue of press releases on the accident. She agreed to review whether there was any room for improvements in the release of information to foreign press and whether Hong Kong's overseas Economic and Trade Offices could be mobilized to assist the GIS in this regard.

27. Mr LEE Wing-tat expressed concern about the possible adverse consequence on flight safety of alleged bonus systems of some airlines which rewarded pilots for making as many approaches as possible. In response, DCA(Atg) and Mr Billy LAM advised that they were not aware of such bonus systems.

28. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:40 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

2 November 1999