

Briefs



WTO Police Powers Row

Hong Kong — Arguing that Hong Kong faces unprecedented security risks during this month's World Trade Organization talks, the government has asked the Legislative Council ('Legco') to give the chief of police sweeping powers to stop protests.

The administration wants Legco to invoke a controversial law for the sealed area around the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai to stop protests if the police commissioner 'reasonably considers it to be necessary to prevent an imminent threat to the interests of national security or public safety, public order for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others, in such manner as he may think fit'.

Those found breaking the law could be jailed for up to five years. When Hong Kong hosted the 1997 World Bank and International Monetary Fund annual meeting and the 2001 Fortune Forum, protesters were governed by obstruction of police and traffic ordinances. Then, the maximum penalty for violators stood at a fine of HK\$1,000 and six months in jail.

The government fears a repeat of violent protests that marred previous WTO conferences in Seattle in 1999 and Cancun, Mexico, in 2003.

The December 12–18 conference is expected to attract 6,000 delegates, 3,000 reporters, 2,000 representatives of non-government organisations and, according to alarmists, an estimated 10,000 protesters. (Source: www.thestandard.com.hk)

Malaysia Warned Over Pirated CDs

Malaysia — Malaysia's government has been accused of failing to act on evidence that its licensed CD factories are producing pirated music, films and software.

The country's recording industry says pirated discs from 12 of the 44 factories licensed by the government have been exported abroad. The suspect plants continue to operate despite complaints while illegal plants have been shut down, the industry says.

Malaysia is thought to be the world's largest exporter of pirated discs. Pirated discs produced in Malaysia have been found across Europe, Asia, Latin America and, most recently, in South Africa. Forensic examinations were made by labs in London belonging to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry ('IFPI'). A spokesman for the Recording Industry Association of Malaysia ('RIM') said the Malaysian authorities had been given the evidence.

'What we are concerned about is that the CD plants are still operating despite our complaints so we do not know what form of action the government has taken,' RIM Chief Executive Officer Tan Ngiap Foo told AFP news agency.

'The forensic tests ... [are] equivalent to DNA tests so we are able to trace the source of the manufacturer.'

Industry bodies and the US government both reckon that licensed Malaysian factories are able to produce around nine million discs every day – 10 times what is needed to meet the demand in Malaysia.

Record companies say that without the political will to stop them, Malaysian pirates will continue to defraud music, film and software companies of billions of dollars every year. (Source: www.bbc.co.uk)

Watchdog Urges 'CIA Jails' Probe

US — The Council of Europe has demanded an investigation into claims that the US ran secret jails for terror suspects.

The human rights watchdog called the claims 'extremely worrying' and said such prisons would constitute a serious human rights violation. A US newspaper said such prisons were set up in eight countries – some of them unnamed eastern European states.

The European Commission says it will encourage states in eastern Europe to comment on the claims. Some governments have already issued denials, including Romania and Poland, which were named by New York-based Human Rights Watch ('HRW') as possible hosts for the prisons.

The Commission will be seeking statements from countries that have not yet denied the existence of such prisons on their territories, said EU spokesman Friso Roscam Abbing. (Source: www.bbc.co.uk)

Man Gets Nine Years on Lesser Charge

Malaysia — Tan Chin Teik was a music CD salesman and had just arrived at the airport in Kuching, purportedly to visit his Indonesian girlfriend. However, the police were already waiting for him and when they searched him, they found 71.13gm of methamphetamine hidden in his underwear and shoes.

Methamphetamine is an addictive stimulant drug that is known by its street name 'Speed'.

That was three years ago; Tan was subsequently charged with drug trafficking under s 39B(2) of the Dangerous Drug Act 1952, which carries the mandatory death penalty on conviction.

On 31 October 2005, the prosecution reduced the charge to that of drug possession and Tan pleaded guilty. Judicial Commissioner David Wong Dak Wah sentenced him to nine years' jail starting from 25 Aug 2002 – the day he was arrested at the airport.

In handing down the sentence, Wong said he had taken into consideration that Tan was a first-time offender, his guilty plea, which had saved the court time and expense, and the seriousness of the offence.

He hoped that the punishment could send a strong warning to would-be offenders. (Source: www.thestar.com.my)