



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

26 February 1985

Dear Charles,

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Hong Kong: Press Release on Kohima Barracks

You should be aware in view of Prime Minister's Questions this afternoon of a press announcement which was made in Hong Kong at 1100Z this morning about the future of the Kohima Barracks Project, which has implications for the future garrison level in Hong Kong. The announcement is as follows:

"EXCO has today decided to recommend discussions be held with the British Government to the effect that we should not proceed with the Kohima Barracks Project and also that the Lyemun site should, as planned, revert to the Hong Kong Government in 1987.

The recommendation was made in the light of a review of the capital works programme provided for in the 1981 Defence Costs Agreement (DCA). It was necessary to consider the matter now because the site formation has been completed at Kohima and decisions on whether to proceed with the next stage are required.

Any effect on the size of the garrison in the future is a question which will require careful discussion with HMG."

The Kohima Barracks Project was designed to produce a barracks built to UK standards to house a second UK battalion in Hong Kong, which would have replaced the Fourth Gurkha Battalion at present there. There are at the moment four Gurkha battalions and one UK battalion in the garrison. The site preparation has reached a stage where a decision needs to be taken whether or not to proceed with the Kohima Project, which, in the light of the agreement and an easing of the illegal immigration problem in Hong Kong, the Governor and the CBF no longer consider necessary.

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The matter was discussed in the Executive Council today. We had not expected any publicity at this stage, and would have preferred there to have been none until after discussions had been held with HMG, Ministers consulted, and decisions taken. Such discussions are necessary before decisions can be taken, because although Hong Kong would have met the bulk of the costs of the project, it is part of the Defence Costs Agreement.

However there have been leaks in Hong Kong and some unhelpful speculation. In order to dampen down speculation it was decided to release the announcement today though it has been made clear that it is only a recommendation and that decisions need to be taken in conjunction with HMG.

/ I enclose a suggested line to take, in the unlikely event that this press statement is raised at Questions this afternoon.

Yr ever,
Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

HONG KONG GARRISON/KOHIMA BARRACKS PROJECT

1. Decisions will need to be taken on the future of the Kohima Barracks Project, and on the size of the garrison in Hong Kong. I understand that the Executive Council in Hong Kong will shortly be making recommendations to HMG and we look forward to having discussions with Hong Kong. I cannot anticipate the outcome of these discussions.

Hong Kong



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