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80,000 may get UK abode right

by **Sheila Dawes, James Tang and Daniel Chung**

ABOUT 80,000 Hongkong people would have the right to leave the colony and settle in Britain or would have the right to seek to do so in the event of an end to British administration, official sources in London estimate.

The figure, which includes 25,000 expatriates, takes into account those who have automatic residence rights in Britain because of their United Kingdom citizenship and those who have the right to seek full British citizenship under the new British Nationality Act.

Leon Brittan, the new British Home Secretary, has power under the Nationality Act to grant UK citizenship to civil servants and members of public bodies in the dependent territories. This power was inserted into the act at the specific request of the Hongkong government. The position of Hongkong police

inspectors under this clause was raised in parliament before the general elections. Home Office officials said there could be no question of allowing a mass influx of Hongkong settlers in Britain and that the "Hongkong clause" in the Nationality Act was intended only for a few thousand people.

The prospect of large numbers of people competing in Britain's job market, where three million are already unemployed, has sharpened opposition to fresh immigration, particularly among Conservative right wingers.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's close interest in the current Sino-British talks is aimed at avoiding any political damage to her personal standing in case the Beijing talks should collapse.

Hongkong observers in England note the beginning of a new anti-Thatcher attack on the prime minister's insistence that the talks should be conducted in secrecy, without any hard

information leaking out on the British side.

Meanwhile, the second phase of the Sino-British talks on Hongkong's future began in Beijing yesterday, again shrouded with secrecy.

Officials of the two sides were reticent of the first session, which began at 9 am and lasted two hours, at a government guesthouse — a former Hungarian legation located near the municipal administrative building.

But both sides disclosed to the press all the names of the delegation members. Diplomats said the disclosure was a further sign of increasing confidence and that the talks were making progress.

The Chinese team consists of Deputy Foreign Minister Yao Guang; the Second Director of Xinhua News Agency in Hongkong, Li Jusheng; Legal Adviser to the Foreign Ministry, Shao Tianren; Adviser to the Foreign Ministry's West European Department, Lu Ping; and Counsellors in the West European Department, Ke Zhaishuo and Lou Jianhan.

Mr Li, who has been with Xinhua News Agency here since 1973, knows Hongkong well. A former journalist, he served as Charge d'Affaires at the Chinese embassy in Jakarta in the 1950s.

Mr Lu is the Vice Director of the Hongkong and Macau Office. He took part in the first phase of the Sino-British talks, and on a number of occasions accompanied the late Liao Chengzhi in receiving Hongkong delegations.

Mr Shao is the Director of the Treaty and Law Department of the Foreign Ministry.

The British team comprises the British ambassador to Beijing, Sir Percy Cradock; the Governor, Sir Edward Youde; Political Adviser, Robin MacLaren; chief interpreter Y.P. Cheng and three senior British embassy officials in Beijing.

The trio are First Secretary in the embassy, William Ehrman; Second Secretary Bob Pierce, who is responsible for Hongkong affairs, and another Second Secretary, Tom Smith.

The editor of the China-watching Seventies magazine, Lee Yee, said the presence of a legal expert in the Chinese team would mean the talks would inevitably touch on the legal aspects of the 1997 issue.

Further details of the talks are expected to be revealed today. The Chinese Foreign Ministry told journalists yesterday a press briefing would be arranged immediately after the meeting this morning.

And at a briefing yesterday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qi Huaiyuan said a recent report on the Chinese stance over the 1997 issue by Asiaweek was incorrect.

The report said China was prepared to revise its constitution to allow Hongkong to retain its capitalist system and enjoy a status different from the mainland.

Mr Qi said last month Premier Zhao Ziyang had pointed out that China would at an opportune time recover sovereignty over Hongkong and take appropriate measures to maintain its prosperity.

British embassy spokesman Nigel Inkster confirmed that Sir Edward will leave for Hongkong tomorrow.