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# Call for HK to reform Soviet-style

By Tim Metcalfe, Sunday Standard

A SOVIET official has called for more perestroika from Hongkong to encourage a growth of mutual trade.

The call for "restructuring" comes as local entrepreneurs are enjoying a bureaucracy-free entry into Eastern Europe in search of new business, while their Iron Curtain counterparts face hindrances in obtaining visas to come here.

Sergey Lomidze, who represents the Soviet airline Aeroflot in Asia, complained: "In this region, Hongkong is still the strictest about visas."

Applications take several weeks to be approved, he said, and visas are only granted if immigration authorities consider visits of benefit to Hongkong.

In Singapore, approval takes 24 hours and no such restrictions are applied, said Bangkok-based Lomidze.

He said: "Your immigration people need some perestroika."

Hongkong businessmen are exploring Eastern Bloc trade potential in increasing numbers following a Trade Development

Council delegation to Moscow last month which collected on-the-spot orders worth \$14 million and prompted negotiations for another \$913.5-million worth of orders.

Sales for last year, excluding December, only totalled \$52 million.

"A lot of businessmen are travelling to Moscow now," said Joe Ng, director of Global Union Express, which represents Aeroflot and the Soviet travel agency Intourist.

"Every day we have bookings."

Trade delegations from Hongkong will also be going to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Yugoslavia this year.

Exports to the Soviet Union are increasing at such a pace that five Aeroflot cargo flights a week from Bangkok are fully laden - mostly with Hongkong goods.

Computers, garments, and electrical appliances comprise the majority of exports.

Ng added: "Now we need more flights. Direct flights to Moscow would be welcome."

The Soviets last year issued 3,500 visas to tourists and businessmen from Hongkong, and expect to receive more applications this year.

At Intourist's Moscow headquarters, representative Irina Shalaeva said: "Visas are no problem. We have never rejected an application."

Visas take a week to be processed, but in urgent cases can be issued in four days. The price of a one-way flight from Bangkok to Moscow is \$3,950.

While businessmen are allowed into Hongkong if they bring trade benefits, Russian tourists are banned.

But restrictions on Soviet visitors have been relaxed and are constantly "being reviewed in the light of political developments", said an Immigration Department spokesman.

They can now participate in sports and cultural events.

"The policy is slowly changing," said Ng. "They are opening the door to Eastern Bloc visitors."