

Anger over European visa-free travel move

BY MING MAN

THE British and Hongkong governments have been accused of not doing enough to safeguard visa-free European travel for territory citizens.

Legislators voiced anger that the Hongkong government may have been aware of a decision by the European Community to end visa-free travel in nine countries almost two months ago, but had not informed them.

Presently, Hongkong citizens with a British Dependent Territories Citizen (BDTC) passport or a British National Overseas (BNO) passport enjoy visa-free travel throughout most of Europe.

Legislators say the move is an erosion of rights and discriminatory.

Independent legislator Jimmy McGregor accused the British government of "not satisfactorily defending us" and questioned what action Britain had taken on behalf of the territory.

The convenor of the Legislative Council sub-committee on nationality, independent legislator Emily Lau, pressed Principal Assistant Secretary for Security Dr Simon Vickers to "come clean and tell us what the British and Hongkong governments had done".

Vickers denied either government had been lax in its efforts to exempt Hongkong citizens from the move.

He said both governments had continued to lobby hard, and no final decision had been made on the issue.

Legislators are writing to British Foreign Secretary Sir Douglas Hurd as part of the campaign.