

## 132 countries on list—but not HK

Washington, Mar. 25.

President Gerald Ford cleared the way for the U.S. to eliminate import duties later this year on a wide range of imports from the developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Mr Ford signed an executive order designating 89 developing countries and 43 dependent territories of other nations as eligible for the special U.S. tariff concessions.

But 24 other countries, including all 13 members of the oil-producers' cartel, were excluded. Members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), were listed separately in the White House order as not eligible for the special U.S. tariff concessions.

Hongkong was excluded, because it is considered a "developed" area and communist nations were not on the list of eligible nations for other reasons.

The "negative" list countries also included Uganda, Somalia and the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen, because of unresolved investment disputes with U.S. companies.

In addition, Israel, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Cyprus were on the "negative" list because of special "reverse" tariff preferences these countries have for imports from the European Economic Community (EEC) or other industrial nations.

Later this year, U.S. officials said, tariffs will be reduced to "zero" on manufactured and semi-manufactured goods and

some agricultural and industrial commodity imports from the eligible developing nations.

Such imports currently total in excess of US\$1,000 million (about HK\$5,000 million) a year.

The final White House determination on what imports would be excluded from the special tariff concessions will be reached after hearings by the International Trade Commission (ITC), to get the views of various groups on the proposed concessions.

Some "import-sensitive" items, including most textiles and practically all types of footwear imports, some types of steel, watches and electronic products, and other goods already have been excluded from the preferential tariff scheme. Congress in passing the 1974 Trade Act also imposed some other general limitations on the tariff concessions.

The "negative" list of countries, ineligible at the time for the U.S. tariff preferences, may be narrowed later this year if Congress agrees to go along with the Ford Administration proposals for easing the restrictions.

The White House and the State Department reportedly would like to switch several OPEC countries (Iran, Indonesia, Nigeria, Venezuela, Ecuador and Gabon) to the list of eligible countries.

Several Bills already are pending in Congress to do this but no "Administration Bill" has yet been put forward.

- AP-DJ.