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Amcham seeks meeting with Beijing officials

By AMELIA CABATIT

THE American Chamber of Commerce is to meet Chinese trade and finance officials in Beijing later this year in an attempt to secure the future of American companies based in Hongkong.

In a separate move, the chamber will lobby against sanctions on China in Washington.

It will also launch a move to counter threats against Hongkong's rights to technology transfer after 1997, said Mr John Kamm, who took over as president of the chamber yesterday.

As far as China is concerned, Amcham has a series of activities planned for this year, the most crucial being a meeting with government officials from the Ministry of Foreign Economic Trade Relations, the China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), the Bank of China and the Foreign Exchange Administration.

Although a date has not yet been set, the mission, on invitation from the CCPIT, aims to examine the continued impact and duration of China's austerity programme on US business interests.

Mr Kamm expressed concern over the future impact of the 16-month-old programme that has put the brakes on consumerism and economic activity on the mainland.

"We want to see how we can improve the investment



John Kamm

climate in China by June," he said.

The chamber will hold a seminar in Guangzhou in March to discuss economic efficiency with students and intellectuals, and will visit Chengdu, in Sichuan province, to investigate business prospects there.

Mr Kamm said China's actions within the next several weeks would be critical in repairing relations with the US.

"The ball is in China's court - it is very important for Beijing to ease the strain in the relationship in the next few weeks," he said.

"If there is no response to President [George] Bush's overture, then the return to normal will be a long affair," Mr Kamm said in reference to the recent visit to Beijing of Mr Brent Scowcroft, Mr Bush's special envoy.

In view of the uncertainty and continuing threats of US sanctions against China, Amcham is to launch a lob-

by in Washington in a bid to get such measures quashed.

The delegation, which will leave in May, will also raise the question of Hongkong's rights to import technology from Western nations.

"The US administration has not really addressed this issue and we must raise the question or it could severely damage Hongkong industry after 1997," Mr Kamm said.

There are fears that severe curbs on exporting technology to China by members of the Paris-based Co-ordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Control (COCOM) will affect Hongkong when it reverts to Chinese rule.

COCOM comprises members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Australia and Japan. Its rules are also binding on another powerful group, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Hongkong, regarded by COCOM as separate from China, has long relied on the transfer of high-technology from Western countries for a competitive edge in its exports.

Mr Kamm said there was a real threat that this technology would be withheld from Hongkong after 1997 and harm it as a regional base for foreign investors.

Amcham has also established an Indochina Committee to account for rising interest in the potential of the markets there.