

A-G out to sell local legal service to Beijing

By LINDY COURSE and FRANK CHOI

THE Attorney-General, Mr Michael Thomas, left for China with a group of local lawyers yesterday in a bid to "sell" Hongkong's legal services to the Chinese.

The Chinese need to use commercial lawyers for contracts and matters arising from their ventures with other countries.

Before he left, Mr Thomas said American lawyers had been quicker off the mark to fill the gap for the Chinese, but he hoped they would see the advantages of using local lawyers.

Some work is already being done for the Chinese by Hongkong lawyers, but Mr Thomas was not sure how much.

"These are the sort of things Hongkong lawyers do well for other foreign firms in Hongkong; they can also do them for Chinese organisations," he said.

He said it was the first time such a trip to promote legal services had been arranged although lawyers and judges had been to China on other sorts of trips.

The one-week visit, al-

though organised by the China Law Society, is the personal initiative of Mr Thomas, who raised the possibility of such a venture while in China in September last year.

He has been working towards the project, together with the Law Society, for over a year.

Mr Thomas is expected to meet officials from the Ministry of Justice and the Secretary-General of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office, Mr Lu Ping, during his stay in Beijing.

"I am head of the Bar and do quite a lot with the Bar and for the Bar. I thought I would do something more general for solicitors and Hongkong firms," he said.

President of the Law Society Mr Brian Tisdall said he thought it was a "totally admirable initiative".

He saw nothing strange in the Attorney-General, a top Hongkong Government official, going over to promote the private profession.

"It is for the good of Hongkong to have a strong legal profession," he said.

Mr Thomas said that in

addition to promoting the skills of the private profession in commercial law, a second aim of the visit was to educate the Chinese on Hongkong's legal system.

Mr Thomas will be giving a paper describing Hongkong's legal system.

Last year he gave similar papers in Beijing and Shanghai which aroused much interest in Hongkong's accusatorial system, the concept of judicial independence and judicial review of Government decisions.

"I want to get it across that it is a good legal system and different. It is right for Hongkong, it suits Hongkong and it will continue to be different after 1997," he said.

Going with Mr Thomas are Mr F.K. Au of Johnson, Stokes and Masters, Mr W. W. Lam of Deacons, Ms Yvonne Chua of Wilkinson and Grist, Mr Robert Phillips of McKenna and Company, Mrs Angelina Lee of Woo, Kwan, Lee and Lo, Mr Alvin K. Y. Ng of Lo, Wong and Tsui, and Mr Stephen Hood of Coward Chance.

They will visit Beijing,

Shanghai and Guangzhou staying for two days in each city.

The first day will be spent giving a seminar to state organisations which are likely to use legal services and answering their questions.

The lawyers, all specialists, will each present papers on topics including joint ventures, commercial disputes, patents and copyright, international construction contracts, company law, carriage of goods by sea and project financing.

Speeches will be distributed in advance in both English and Chinese so those interested can familiarise themselves with the subjects.

The second day will be spent on follow-up calls.

"There seems to be a lot of interest because they have had to change one venue to a larger place," said Mr Thomas.

"I believe there is interest because people in China want to know what can be done by outside lawyers for joint venture work, regional work," he said.