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Akers-Jones defends the 'musical chairs'

Recent top-level changes in Government might look like musical chairs, but governing Hongkong was not child's play, the Secretary for the New Territories, Mr David Akers-Jones, said yesterday.

"Hongkong is a place of movement. You would not wish your Government to stand aloof from this," he told a meeting of the Association of Past Chairmen of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

"We need stable government, but not static government," he said, referring to recent changes in his own responsibilities and those of the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Denis Bray.

"This Government game of musical chairs, this shuffle, has a discernible pattern to it and, when the music stops

and we all sit down on our chairs in our offices or at the meetings of the district boards, the business of the day-to-day government of this great place will have taken another sensible step forward," said Mr Akers-Jones.

He added that this would enable us to deal more adequately and efficiently with the radically changed tempo of the 80s and the aspirations of our people.

He suggested the changes had come because developments in Hongkong had reached a stage when the city and the New Territories were becoming more alike.

Mr Akers-Jones said that both he and Mr Bray had shared responsibility for past developments in district administration.

"But they have now reached a stage when the city and

the New Territories are fast becoming more alike.

"It was a sensible step, therefore, to put the whole machinery under one command," he explained.

But these were not the only changes taking place, said Mr Akers-Jones, who is due to take overall charge for district administration in both the city and New Territories.

"The Public Works Department in the city areas is also organising its works programme to deal with district development in a more co-ordinated and systematic way, somewhat akin to the so-called 'package' system of development successfully adopted in our new towns," he said.

"Changes in the administration of land are following the same pattern.

"District officers have been local land officers in the New Territories for 80 years.

"Now it is proposed that there should be district land officers in the districts of the city as well as the New Territories but, because of the weight of the district officers' general political responsibilities, the day-to-day work of land administration will be handled by the Lands Department.

"District officers will stand back a bit, but they will not abdicate their general responsibility for promoting the good government of their districts.

"We should thus see before long a system of district administration that is closely integrated in all its aspects with the district boards throughout the whole territory."