

Governor 'trying to prolong rule'

Beijing blasts Patten over post-97 stand

NO KWAI-YAN in Beijing
GENEVIEVE KU
and **SHARON CHEUNG**

China last night accused the Governor of attempting to extend colonial rule beyond the handover by laying down benchmarks on Hong Kong's future.

The accusations, in a report by Xinhua (the New China News Agency), referred to comments made by Chris Patten in his final Policy Address to the Legislative Council on Wednesday.

Mr Patten laid down what he regarded as the 10 major planks of the future Hong Kong government - covering areas such as freedom of the economy and maintenance of the welfare policy.

He also issued 16 "benchmarks" for the world to measure China's post-handover commitment to "one country, two systems" and guard against its interference in Hong Kong's domestic affairs.

The report said: "People ask: 'What does Mr Patten want?' In his own words, he said he does not want a smooth transition, but a successful transition.

"What he's referring to is to prolong colonial rule after the handover to influence the operation of the Special Administrative Region government."

A spokesman at Xinhua's Hong Kong office said it also regretted accusations by Mr Pat-

ten that some people were risking the autonomy of Hong Kong by seeking to influence Chinese officials to further their own self-interests.

China's top spokesman on Hong Kong affairs, Lu Ping (鲁平), said he had no knowledge of Mr Patten's claims, but urged him to have an open mind over views that differed from his own.

Mr Lu, director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, said: "Everybody is entitled to their own views. I have never said somebody might have surreptitiously complained to us about Governor Patten."

Government sources said Mr Patten had been referring to lobbying by some bidders for mobile phone system licences for Beijing to keep the number of franchises low.

Speaking during a radio phone-in programme yesterday, Mr Patten still refused to name names, but said he would not back down.

"I think I will let people talk about it and hope people recognise that the most important way of protecting our autonomy in Hong Kong is to let all of us stand up for it," he said.

He argued that London would never listen to surreptitious lobbying by Hong Kong individuals.

"Anybody who tried to get ministers in London to change or block a decision taken by the Hong Kong Government would

have been sent packing," he said.

Mr Patten was confident his successor, the chief executive, would also speak out if he believed his authority was being undermined.

"I am absolutely sure that my successor will feel as strongly about this issue as I do. I am sure that he or she will recognise the importance of being seen as Hong Kong's representative in Peking rather than the other way round."

Candidate for chief executive, Peter Woo Kwong-ching, said he hoped the Special Administrative Region government would have full discretion to decide on all issues after the handover.

"I hope Beijing will only listen to people's advice, but leave the decision to the SAR government," he said.

Mr Woo believed Beijing would respect the decisions of the SAR government as it had promised Hong Kong would enjoy high autonomy.

Chairman of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, James Tien Pei-chun, urged Mr Patten to clarify his accusations.

He said its members often travelled to Beijing to lobby officials on Hong Kong issues, but not for personal gain.