

# 10,000 PLA troops for garrison

By Yonden Lhatoo

UP to 10,000 People's Liberation Army troops are expected to be stationed in Hong Kong after the handover, according to the Commander of the British Forces.

Returning from an historic meeting in Shenzhen yesterday with the head of the incoming PLA garrison, Major-General Bryan Dutton said the strength of PLA troops in Hong Kong would probably be the same as the British Garrison at peak strength.

Britain had 9,000-10,000 armed forces personnel stationed in Hong Kong before 1994, but that number has been cut to about 3,000.

While the future PLA garrison was formally introduced to the public in January, China has yet to reveal the number of troops it will station here.

"They said they would be bringing in a similar number of troops to the size of the garrison we used to have here, but they acknowledged the fact, of course, that they are just across the border in Shenzhen... they don't have some of the logistic problems that we have supporting a garrison thousands of miles away from our own country," he said.

"I got the impression that they will rotate their men between here and their barracks in Shenzhen and that they intend to use Hong Kong for normal military training, but I got no impression that you would see them on the streets."

Responding to concerns about corruption in the PLA, he said: "They reaffirmed to me their firm commitment to the fact that there would be no commercial involvement by the PLA garrison in Hong Kong."

Gen Dutton said the PLA was

well aware of the need to move in "sensitively" and he was impressed with their determination to get it right.

"They are coming from a very different position to my forces and they have accepted the fact that life here in Hong Kong is very different from life in a normal garrison town in mainland China. They have to adjust to that... at the moment they seem determined to do so and I'm very happy to see that."

He pointed out that the PLA would be very different from the British troops because they were conscripts rather than volunteers and closer to home.

"This is the first time the PLA has had to transpose a garrison and I think they are approaching this problem with a great deal of realism... they know they have a lot to learn."

He said his meeting with the commander of the future Special Administrative Region garrison, Major-General Liu Zhenwu, was an attempt to form a professional relationship "a layer below that of the Joint Liaison Group" that would lead to a greater understanding between the two sides.

"I did invite General Liu to visit Hong Kong and I hope that will happen in the not too distant future. I hope this forms a firm basis for future liaison leading to the eventual transfer of defence responsibility as part of the transfer of sovereignty next year.

"During the course of this visit, I was able to brief General Liu on the way we do business here. He was able to brief me on the training, preparation and selection of his personnel, and the way he was approaching his future task."