

# Angry Patten demands details of Xi's 'trial'

By Antony Cheesewright in London, Jim Cheung and Kiwi Lee

GOVERNOR Chris Patten has reacted with contempt to China's sentencing of Hong Kong journalist Xi Yang to 12 years in prison for espionage and stealing state secrets.

It was the first time Mr Patten had publicly commented on the controversial jail sentence which the governor's deputy described this week as causing "dismay" in government circles.

Speaking at a news confer-

ence in London yesterday, Mr Patten challenged the secrecy of Xi's detention, and questioned whether there had ever been a trial.

And he queried the conviction of espionage: "There are not many societies who consider interest rates to be a state secret."

But as he spoke, Mr Patten was being lambasted at a special meeting of Hong Kong lawmakers for "cowardly and impotent" inaction on the case.

Discussing the ramifi-

cations of Xi's case for press freedom in Hong Kong, legislators called on the British government to immediately summon the Chinese Ambassador to London, Ma Yuzhen, to explain Xi's conviction and sentencing.

Mr Patten evaded any questions on whether Britain could use diplomatic clout to pressure China to show leniency in Xi's case.

The Governor called on Beijing to produce details of Xi's trial, when and where it was held, and the evidence produced against him.

"If China wants to get its case across, it must recognise that the world deserves some answers to some straightforward questions," he said.

He had discussed the situation "briefly" with the British Minister Responsible for Hong Kong, Alastair Goodlad and it had been decided to leave further action in the hands of the British embassy in Beijing "for the moment".

"We have to take the word of Chinese officials that there even was a trial.

"I cannot, alas, report progress on getting more information about Xi's case — the details are surrounded in mystery," Mr Patten said.

In Hong Kong, legislators met for two hours with media representatives to consider what action could be taken on the case.

But the Governor's Information Co-ordinator Michael Hanson told the meeting "the pressure ought to be applied to Beijing not Hong Kong".

The government did not intend to step up actions to protest against the sentence.

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XI YANG: Jailed for revealing China's "interest rates".

## Patten reacts with contempt to Xi's case

Mr. Hanson said they had been "advised to move carefully" on the case.

British Ambassador to China, Sir Robin MacLaren, was clarifying Xi's trial and seeking clear guidelines for reporters in China.

But legislators, disgruntled by what they see as government inaction, will seek the endorsement of their House Committee next Friday to call on the government to pressure China over the case.

They would also consider a resolution urging the government to speed up the localisation of state secret laws for the Special Administrative Region government.

And they called on the administration to enact laws to guarantee freedom of information in the territory.

At the meeting, Foreign Correspondents' Club vice-president Carl Goldstein proposed to "bring the case to the world's attention" in a bid to persuade Beijing to be lenient to Xi's appeal.

But Yu Pun-hoi, the Chairman of the Ming Pao Group, which employed Xi, opposed any move to "politicise or internationalise" the case.

"I think this will only jeopardise Xi's appeal," he said.

He said officials from China's State Security Ministry and Xinhua News Agency had warned him not to "internationalise" the issue.

Chinese officials yesterday endorsed the company's hiring of two defence counsel to represent Xi in his appeal.

The lawyers will have access to the legal documents, including the allegations against Xi and records of the trial proceedings which have been strictly kept secret.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) yesterday claimed China may have breached its own legal pro-

cedures in trying and sentencing Xi.

After examining China's criminal procedure law, the HKJA cited Article 111 which states that "in a case not to be heard in public, the reasons for not hearing it in public shall be announced in court".

HKJA executive committee member Fong So said no reason for the secrecy of Xi's trial had ever been given.

Mr So also cited Article 121: "The announcement of the judgement is in all cases to be made public." He claimed this also had not been complied with.

United Democrats legislators yesterday marched to the local Xinhua office to demand Xi's immediate release. They plan to hold an eight-hour sit-in outside Xinhua today in support of the three-day hunger strike by three senior *Ming Pao* editors.