

# Basic Law education call sparks rift fears

By M Y Sung in Beijing

CHINA'S think tank preparing for the transfer of sovereignty may have opened a new rift in the already beleaguered Sino-British relations.

The Preliminary Working Committee (PWC) has urged the Hong Kong government to better educate the population on the Basic Law.

The two sovereign states have fallen out over Britain's interpretation of the Basic Law on which Governor Chris Patten based his constitutional reforms.

Beijing says Mr Patten's reforms are in breach of the Basic Law, and if implemented, will result in the dissolution of the territory's three tiers of government by China in 1997.

PWC members yesterday conceded that there might be friction in urging the Hong Kong government to educate people about the Basic Law in preparation for the transfer of sovereignty.

They said the Chinese side would be forced to clarify what it believed to be misleading and inaccurate interpretations of the document — to be Hong Kong's mini-constitution after 1997.

Wu Jianfan, the head of the PWC's cultural group, which yesterday ended a two-day session in Beijing, said it was the responsibility of the Hong Kong government to promote the Basic Law as an instrument of stability in the uncertain years before 1997.

PWC member Tsang Yok-sing, leader of the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong, said areas of different interpretation would be clarified.

"If the contents or certain articles of the Basic Law are deliberately misinterpreted, we will stand up to clarify it."

He claimed Britain's "unco-operative attitude" on political reform might influence its promotion of the Basic Law.

■ Chinese Premier Li Peng will visit Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in March to renew the appointment of the first batch of Hong Kong advisers to the Chinese government on the territory.

According to Chinese sources, Mr Li will also announce another batch of advisers from Hong Kong, showing China's resolve for a smooth transition of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, even without British co-operation.