

Appointed seats may be restored after '97

By Flora Wong

APPOINTED district board seats may be re-introduced after 1997, a former district board chairman and pro-Beijing power broker says.

Ambrose Lau, former chairman of the Central and Western District Board, Preliminary Working Committee (PWC) member and Hong Kong Affairs Adviser, said it would not come as a surprise if the future Special Administrative Region (SAR) government decided to reinstate appointed seats.

Mr Lau criticised the present district boards for being too politicised.

An appointed member, Mr Lau did not run in the most recent district board election in which all appointed seats were scrapped.

He said appointed members could "balance" the board. He also urged for a "pragmatic" democratic progression, pointing out that district board members were "demoralised"

by their dwindling attention and support.

"When the district board was first established, the government paid much attention to it," he said.

The introduction of direct elections to the Legislative Council had defeated the importance of the district boards as a consultative body, he said.

He said officials became more answerable to those legislators who were occupied with district affairs.

Mr Lau, who founded the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance in April, said he was so busy building the party that he decided not to run for election. Two of the party's eight candidates won seats. The party has 150 members, mainly from the business and professional sectors.

Mr Lau said they would field candidates for future polls.

He said his party would work with the Chinese government on cross-border trade, anti-corruption measures and the new airport.