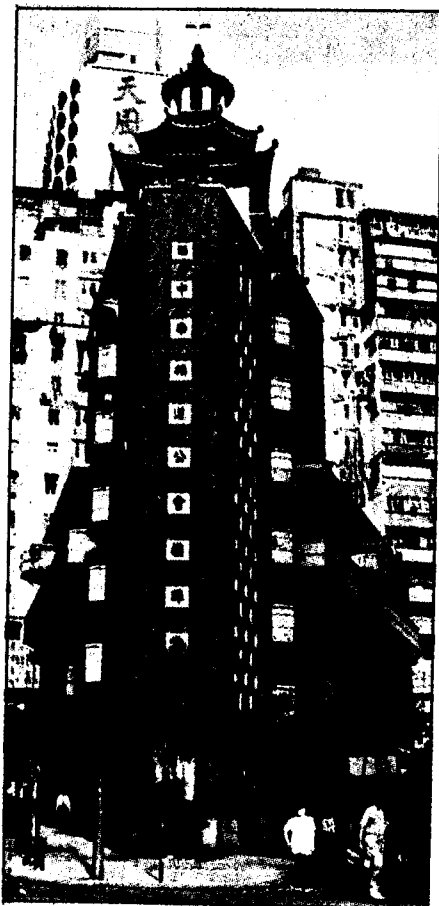


\$90m church redevelopment in Wan Chai runs into snag



By CLIFFORD LO
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THE planned \$90-million redevelopment of Wan Chai's Methodist Church (left) appears to have hit a major problem just one week before senior members expected the deal to be finalised.

The red-bricked triangular landmark on the corner of Hennessy and Johnston roads was to have been rebuilt into a 22-storey commercial and community building in conjunction with New World Development.

The church's project general secretary, the Reverend Lo Lung-kwong, said they thought the final agreement would be signed with the developer on June 1 so construction could start four months later.

"But the developer has not yet confirmed when they will sign an agreement with us. They seem to be postponing it for a commercial reason. I don't know," Mr Lo said.

The church has already booked space elsewhere to hold services and carry out office work while the redevelopment is under way.

"Originally, the construction work was scheduled to be begun in the summer last year. But it has been postponed until later this year."

New World Development refused to say when a deal would be struck or if it had been originally planned on June 1, as Mr Lo claimed.

A spokesman said the firm was sorting out technical problems with the church but declined to specify what the problems were, saying it was a "commercial secret".

Although the 57-year-old church will be demolished, many of its original features will be preserved.

They include the foundation stone, pulpit, altar, hand-printed glass, organ, iron gate, wooden panelling and copper railings.

Other items such as some lamps, long wooden benches, lock sets, and wooden doors will be used in the new building, Mr Lo said.

The reason for developing the site was a lack of space for community services and the fact that it was difficult and expensive to repair, he said.

The chairman of the Antiquities Advisory Board, Mr David Lung Ping-ye, said the Methodist Church was not really a historical building, being built with concrete inside and decorated with a red-brick exterior.

But he said: "The old building is a landmark in Wan Chai and a reminder of Hongkong's past."