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\$230m handover party 'too costly'

Legislators have accused the Government of being too extravagant over the handover ceremony.

Bruce Liu Sing-lee, of the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, asked at a special Finance Committee meeting on the 1997-98 spending estimates if the Government could spend less on the ceremony.

"It will cost the territory \$230 million. Can the administration cut the expense?" he asked.

Legislator Emily Lau Wai-hing also deplored the cost, citing as an example the Government's planned spending of more than \$5 million on hotel bookings.

Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs Lee Lap-sun denied the claims of extravagance.

"I cannot tell you yet what kind of red wine we will drink nor which class of abalone we will eat. But, it is a grand ceremony. We have to treat the high-level guests in an appropriate manner," Mr Lee said.

"Extravagance? It depends on the calibre of guests you are inviting. Most of our guests will be heads of state who must be treated with a certain level of decorum. We will do it according to international practice," he added.

NO KWAI-YAN