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\$90b projects not in danger

By Helen Lam

THE Government will spend \$90 billion on major projects despite recent political turmoils in Beijing, the Secretary for Lands and Works, Mr Graham Barnes, said yesterday.

The projects included the construction of a new airport, additional port facilities and a highway linking mainland China and Hongkong, Mr Barnes said.

Mr Barnes said Hongkong was still the gateway to China and a central crossroad of Asia, which he called the most exciting continent in the world.

Most of the territory's population would remain after 1997 and the Sino-British Joint Declaration provided a solid constitutional basis for prosperity and progress during the next 58 years, he said.

These elements were recognised by many people, such as the Japanese, he said.

He dismissed worries

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that there would be funding problems due to any uncertainty of Hongkong's future.

“When you are in physical planning, you expect vicissitudes and you have to plan in the broad dictated by the essentials of the case,” he said during a luncheon address to the Association of Chairmen of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

Mr Barnes said the rapid development of China's Pearl River Delta Area and the increased demand for Chinese imports and exports required an extraordinary amount of planning and reshaping of Hongkong's economic infrastructure.

He said new infrastructure was “essential” to

ensure Hongkong was prepared for the economic activities of the 21st Century.

“Without a renewal of our infrastructure, we will be unable to play the essential part of a system and economy which helps the expansion of China, a role on which our future depends,” he said.

Mr Barnes said the first and foremost project was the provision of additional port facilities.

There are massive opportunities for expansion of the port off north Lantau, west of Castle Peak and elsewhere, he said.

Further projects would include a fixed crossing, either a bridge or tunnel, from Tsing Yi to Lantau

and a super highway from the border to either Hongkong Island or wherever the new airport would be built.

Mr Barnes said a final decision on the location of the new airport would be made by October.

Chek Lap Kok and Lamma Island currently share even chances, he said.

He said since the private sector had slowed down its construction programmes and some workers had returned from China, the labour shortage in the construction field had eased recently.

Regardless, the early stages of the construction of the airport, such as reclamation, would re-

quire large machines such as dredgers, he said. It would not be labour intensive, so a tight labour supply would not affect its progress.

Mr Barnes said an airport at the Chek Lap Kok location would cost \$5 billion less to build and because of the previous studies, there would be less uncertainty involved.

But the Lamma Island was a more convenient location and was more ideal for designing two separate runways.

On the environmental impact, Mr Barnes said the Environmental Protection Department favoured the Chek Lap Kok location because it was better in terms of its effect on water flows.

It would cost at least \$21 billion for the reclamation of the new airport, \$40 billion for the fixed crossing and \$24 billion for the highway from China.

Another one billion would be needed to build the University of Science and Technology and expand existing tertiary institutions.