

S. A. M. P.

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116 are still on the hook

By HAROLD CHANG

The decision by the Independent Commission Against Corruption not to renew bail of 116 people does not mean they will not be prosecuted.

The commission's Operations Department still holds travel documents of all 116 people, including 105 serving policemen, four senior Customs and Excise officers, seven former policemen and civilians.

A report of ICAC investigations, in connection with the alleged taking of bribes and protection of the Yaumati fruit market drug syndicate, is now being studied by the Attorney General.

However, the ICAC move, announced late on Sunday night, brought into focus once again the charge that the commission sometimes employs "high-handed" methods during investigations.

Police have in the recent past alleged that they were forced to sign their own bail forms by ICAC officials.

"It appears the rights and privileges of the suspects, policemen or otherwise, have not been fully explained to them when they were given bail," an legal expert said.

"Similar to police bail, a man can refuse to be placed on bail if he wishes and the ICAC would have no alternative but to either charge him with an offence under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance or release him within 48 hours."

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A senior police officer said yesterday it appears to him the majority of those who have been on bail were not informed of their rights and were simply told to sign their bail forms and surrender their travel documents.

This mainly applies to junior policemen who might have agreed to be placed on bail because of their ignorance of the procedures and their rights, he added.

It was not until recent events and the formation of a preparatory committee of junior policemen that discussions with legal experts brought the matter into light.

On Friday, 18 officers from Shamshuipo Police Station, who had been on bail since July, held a meeting shortly before their bail was scheduled to be renewed that day.

They all agreed not to renew their bail and when they went to the ICAC that morning all had their bail of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 returned to them.

It is believed Friday's events were taken into account before the ICAC made the announcement on Sunday night.

"The bail for some of the 116 people expired today and was scheduled to expire for the others tomorrow and Wednesday," a commission spokesman said yesterday.

"A decision was made not to renew bail pending the consideration of the case by the Attorney-General.

"The non-renewal of bail will have no effect on the Attorney-General's consideration," he stressed.

"The question of bail is purely a matter for the ICAC."