

10 accused of bribery over faulty homes

By SETH FAISON and BRIAN WONG

AFTER more than three years of investigation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) into the territory's worst-ever housing scandal, charges were yesterday brought against 10 people.

Announcing a total of 46 charges, Commissioner Geoffrey Barnes said that all 10 — seven of them former or current Government officials — would be brought to the Central Magistracy this morning.

Among the 10 people facing charges are Siu Hon-sum, 62, proprietor of On Lee Siu Construction Limited, as well as five retired civil servants and two officials currently serving in the Architectural Services Department: chief technical officer Cheung Yuk-chee, and clerk of works Pang Chin-ah.

The others are: Ho Leung, 70, retired proprietor of Yeu Shing Construction Company Limited and now a Canadian citizen; Pun Pak-shing, 53, a merchant and former construction manager of Dah Cheng and Company building contractor.

The former civil servants are: Tam Wing-hang, 49, former assistant clerk of works of the Public Works Department and now a construction manager; Lam Fuk-wah, 62, former PWD clerk of works and a retired lecturer; Yeung Man-yiu, alias Henry Kenneth Young, 64, retired PWD clerk of works; Lee Keung-shing, 44, former PWD foreman and now a senior engineer in a public company; and So Ka-kiu, 58, retired surveying assistant.

Siu, Ho, Pun and Cheung face a total of 18 counts of offering advantages to public servants.

Cheung and the other former or serving Government officers face three counts of soliciting advantages and 25 counts of accepting advantages.

All will be charged at the Central Magistracy today, pending a transfer to the District Court.

"The offences involve the soliciting and acceptance of advantages, against the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance," said Mr Barnes.

With the alleged offences dating back to the early 1960s, when some faulty housing blocks were first built, the investigations became one of the longest and most complex ever undertaken by the ICAC.

Since they began in 1984, ICAC officials involved in the case had held more than 300 extensive interviews and travelled to eight countries to collect evidence, Mr Barnes said.

The filing of charges was delayed, he said, because after evidence was submitted to the Attorney-General's Office last April, prosecutors requested additional evidence.

Mr Barnes would not say how many suspects the ICAC had submitted evidence on, but conceded that there was at least some, if not conclusive, evidence on many more than the 10 charged.

"This investigation is not yet complete. We are still encouraging those with relevant information to contact us," he said.

Mr Barnes insisted it was nothing more than a "pleasant coincidence" that the charges were made the same day that the ICAC had opened its first international anti-corruption conference.

Additional charges against one more person, who is ill, have been delayed.

The charges concern sub-standard blocks that were developed as low-cost Government estates under the supervision of the former Public Works Department between 1964 and 1970.

The investigations began in 1984 after defects were discovered in 26 public housing blocks on 11 estates. Determined to have been built with sub-standard concrete, they were officially declared defective by the Housing Authority in November 1985.

About \$800 million will have been spent on demolishing the blocks by July

1989, redeveloping them and rehousing the 17,000 families affected.

Tests were carried out by the Housing Department on all Government low cost housing and resettlement estates and the results of the tests were submitted to the Governor.

On January 21, 1986, the Chief Secretary issued a certificate for a second investigation to be undertaken, this time widening the scope to cover all Government low cost housing and resettlement estates, and in particular the 26 housing blocks.

The ICAC set up a nine-man team to carry out the investigation, which has to date taken more than 22,000 man-hours.

The scope of the investigation encompassed 730 individuals and companies and over 300 people were interviewed.

Inquiries have taken ICAC officers to countries such as Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Cyprus.

A report of the investigation was submitted to the Legal Department at the end of April. It runs to 150 pages with accompanying documents.

Mr Barnes said difficulty arose in inquiries because many of those involved had died or emigrated, while relevant documents had either been thrown away or destroyed.

Of the total 46 charges, 26 were brought under the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance which was in effect until May 1971 when it was replaced by the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance. That means the 26 charges relate to offences allegedly committed before 1971.

An ICAC spokesman said yesterday that the current prosecution did not mean that the investigation was over.

"Inquiries are still continuing and this why we hope members of the public who have information on the case will come forward to assist us."