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Alliance and council near deal on damage

THE Urban Council and the pro-democracy Hongkong alliance are close to agreement on compensation for damage to public facilities caused by demonstrations and rallies.

A spokesman for the Hongkong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China, Mr Cheung Man-kwong, said yesterday major breakthroughs had been made.

"We have at last found common points to negotiate with each other and the alliance is now waiting for a new figure from the Urban Services Department," Mr Cheung said.

Negotiators had agreed on the nature of damage the alliance should be responsible for, he said.

Mr Cheung said both sides had agreed not to

make public details of the negotiations until an agreement had been reached.

Urbco had sought \$500,000 for damage done to Victoria Park and Happy Valley racecourse as well as over-time wages for its staff.

The demonstrations and rallies, attended by hundreds of thousands, condemned the imposition of martial law and the crackdown in Beijing.

But the alliance said it was unfair for the municipal council to include over-time wages in its compensation claim.

The alliance also said the council should not blame them for all the damage since the parks were used by members of the public as well.

The sources said some Urbco members close to

the alliance had played the role as go-betweens to bring both sides to the negotiation table.

The sources said Mr Man Sai-cheong was one of the Urbco members who had contributed to bringing both sides together.

Mr Man said yesterday he did not regard himself as the mediator but had only voiced his understanding of the situation to the two parties.

"Luckily, they (the Urbco) accepted my suggestion that it would be unnecessary to take the dispute to court and that we should be flexible as far as laws permit," he said.

He said the alliance also should not put Urbco in a difficult position as the council was bound by its rules and had to answer queries from the Director of Audit.