

# 300,000 NLI leases to get 50-year extension

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**MOST of the 300,000 land leases in the New Territories, which will expire in 1997, will be extended by a period of up to 50 years. The Standard has learnt.**

The extension of such leases to 2047 will be effected by legislation which has been agreed in principle by both Chi-

na and Britain during previous meetings of the Sino-British Land Commission.

A critical review is being undertaken by Government land policy-makers on the issue of New Territories land leases, and it is expected a proposal, including the draft legislation, will soon be ready for discussion with Chinese officials, sources said.

This issue will be, by far, the most important subject to come under the scrutiny of the Sino-British Land Commission since its inception last year. The body was set up by the British and Chinese Governments to tackle land leases here before the territory goes back to the Chinese fold in 1997.

The proposed legislation will broadly divide the ex-

isting leases in the New Territories into several categories, and holders of leases in some categories will be granted an automatic extension.

"Generally speaking, most of the leases in the New Territories are for residential purposes, and it is likely that they will fall into the category of automatic extension until 2047," a source close to the Land Commission said.

Through the final proposal is still being worked out, preliminary views on the subject have been exchanged during previous meetings of the Land Commission.

The intention to grant an extension of 50 years to the New Territories land leases is to "keep in line with the spirit of the Joint Declaration," the source said.

The Governor, Sir Edward Youde, also said in his annual address to the Legislative Council earlier this month that the extension of these leases would best be achieved through legislation.

He also hinted strongly that the extension of these leases would be dealt with under the relevant provisions of the Joint Declaration.

for those short-term tenancies and leases for special purposes, that expire before June 30, 1997, may be extended for a period not later than June 30, 2047, without the payment of an additional premium.

But after the signing of the Joint Declaration, it was understood that the Chinese side told their British counterparts that the clause refers to land in urban areas only — Hongkong Island and Kowloon Peninsula south of Boundary Street, which were ceded to Britain in the last century.

The current thinking among Government officials is to adopt a uniform policy of granting extension of New Territories land leases, which expire by 1997, until 2047, to keep them in line with land leases in urban areas.

Underlining this thinking is the move to introduce a proposal to extend the current rates system to rural areas to cover the entire territory of Hongkong following a Government review on the value of rate levels.

case-by-case basis.

This made a review necessary into the question of New Territories land leases, where land ownership is much more complicated, sources said.

Both Chinese and Hongkong Government officials working with the Land Commission shared the view that it would be impossible to handle the 300,000 land leases on a

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According to the joint pact, all land leases, except