

S. C. M. P.

27 Jan 1984

A creative year at district level

The year 1983 has been a creative year for community life as far as district administration is concerned.

The local community became more united as Hongkong went through a year of uncertainty over its future, the Secretary for District Administration, Mr David Akers-Jones, said.

Reviewing the work of district boards this year, Mr Akers-Jones said on Friday that district administration was becoming more organised than in the past in channelling public views to the Government.

He expected there would be greater exchange of information between the community at all levels and the Government in matters concerning district affairs.

"District boards have lived up to the expectation of what they should do and in the future, they should have more information about policy matters before decisions are made by the Government.

"In the past, decisions were centrally made by the Government and the time is ready now that the district boards can be consulted to enable the central Government to formulate better policy.

"And the trend is now heading for a more open and localised Government.

"By and large, district administration has made considerable impact on the life of Hongkong and I am quite sure that it will evolve into a stronger organisation as it goes on.

"After all, the scheme is a new development in Hongkong and it is hard to predict



Mr Akers-Jones

how it will evolve in the future," he said.

Mr Akers-Jones noted that the stimulus from district boards was evident in local activities and festivities, although these might not be important in the eyes of many.

But he said this sort of work formed the base for further development of district administration.

"District boards should take greater interest in using local facilities which have been provided in the districts, and in the people who use them, to make sure the public is making the best use of them," he said.

And after the 1985 general election, district boards will for the first time be chaired by unofficials, he said.

"It will be a further step towards an open Government with an unofficial as the chairman of a district board.

"Such a change is expected to put district administration on a much better footing, because many members feel that with the district officer as

the chairman for both district board and district management committee — the executive arm of the district board — officials will fix up deals behind closed doors at DMC meetings against the general wish of unofficials.

"Such allegations are both unfounded and untrue, but with an unofficial as chairman we can brush aside such allegations," he said.

As for the localisation of the Government, Mr Akers-Jones said this had been the trend in past years and he would be surprised if this process were not continuing.

And he expected the Government will continue to appoint unofficial district board members to the higher policy-making councils.

But he noted that direct election to the Legislative Council or even the Executive Council might not be the right solution to open up the Government, because the society of Hongkong was made up of complicated components and must have representatives from all sectors and classes to provide the best mix of people.

All 267 unofficial district members will be invited to meet in separate groups with top officials of the City and New Territories Administration and Mr Akers-Jones in the next two to three weeks to express their views on ways to improve the district administration system.

And in the first half of next year, the second Conference on District Administration will be held to encourage exchange of views between officials and unofficials.