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# Archaeological funding delayed

By JAD STONER

A REQUEST for \$40 million to excavate 26 archaeological sites as much as 6,000 years old on Northern Lantau and Chek Lap Kok has been delayed, and probably will not receive full funding.

The project, announced in early March by the Antiquities Advisory Board, has been broken into parts amid scepticism that the amount would be granted by the Finance Committee.

"We have submitted an application for the funds, but we don't have a decision yet," Deputy Secretary for Culture at the Recreation and Culture Branch, Ms Shelly Lau Lee Lai-kuen, said last week.

"The board has requested the money from the branch to process through the central government, and we're just asking where the money will come from — the yearly allocation system, the airport project itself or perhaps even

such public funds as the Royal Hongkong Jockey Club.

"We have asked only for \$1.5 million for now, though, to do just Chek Lap Kok because of the time factor," she said.

Sources close to the controversy said that the Finance Committee had denied the \$40 million request, offering instead \$5 million for the project.

Finance Committee spokesmen said they had received no requests for funds.

"I'm still waiting for the Recreation and Culture proposal, and it's up to them to propose the amount," said committee member Mr Ng Hon-wah.

"I have heard of the \$40 million request and am still waiting for the formal application."

The Principal Assistant Secretary for Culture, Mr Peter Bourton, suggested that the full \$40 million request would not be submitted.

"We're seeking the re-

sources to tackle Chek Lap Kok, but that request is separate from the Antiquities Advisory Board's request," Mr Bourton said.

"The \$40 million hasn't been anywhere near the Finance Committee yet. We will be applying for resources, but I don't know if it will be \$40 million."

The Chek Lap Kok site is under particular threat from builders who are scheduled next April to begin levelling the island off the west coast of Lantau for Hongkong's new two-runway airport.

"There are any number of sites and kilns — Bronze Age occupation, Tang and Sung dynasty occupation. Every phase of Hongkong's history is represented, and it needs to be studied before the whole thing is radically transformed," said a Archaeological Society spokesman.

Researchers at Chek Lap Kok hope to begin work in October, finishing by the April start of construction.

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Finance Committee