

H. K. Standard

11 October 1985

AG: bilingual draft will please China too

by ^{MB}
Danny Lo

THE idea of drafting the laws of Hongkong both in Chinese and English will not only have wide support here but also in China, the Attorney-General said yesterday.

Mr Michael Thomas also set a timetable of seven to 10 years for the bilingual law drafting and translation programme which is to begin soon.

Mr Thomas was speaking to reporters after a Zonta Club of Kowloon lunch meeting at the Hongkong Hotel.

He said having an authentic Chinese version of the laws of Hongkong would help China understand Hongkong's legal system.

Mr Thomas visited China for 10 days last month during which he visited various legal institutions.

He did not agree with the view that the purpose of producing legislation in Chinese

was more political than practical.

"There are a large number of people who cannot read English or who cannot read English well enough to understand the law in their own tongue," he said.

"It's a matter of principle that law should be available to the people in their own language.

"Given the future, given the arrangements for the Special Administrative Region, given the provisions of the Joint Declaration about how the ordinances of Hongkong would be carried over, it is even more important that the language of the law should be both English and Chinese.

"English, because that is the tradition of the law; Chinese because increasingly

the community will be Chinese," he said.

The intention of the scheme, he said, was that the text of both the Chinese and English version should be equally authentic.

Under present arrangements, the scheme would be carried out by legal draftsmen working side by side with skilled translators.

Mr Thomas said the ideal would be for the job to be done by bilingual draftsmen but it was not possible as there was a shortage of such expertise.

He noted that lawyers working for the government very often did not stay long before going into the more lucrative private practice.

"I would like to reverse that as much as I possibly can. Indeed we have had recently one or two local Hongkong Chinese lawyers coming from the private sector into the government and I hope that that would be an increasing tendency," he said.

Mr Thomas then revealed that there had been five complaints made to the Independent Commission Against Corruption over the recent Legislative Council elections.

Only three of these involved allegations of improper behaviour and were punishable, he said.