

\$29m tag for new bilingual law texts

By OWEN HUGHES

ALL 32 volumes of Hongkong's laws are to be republished at a cost of \$29 million to accommodate the addition of a Chinese text of all ordinances.

Law draftsmen say the existing manner in which laws are published is outdated and results in delays in the printing of some regulations and a substantial manpower burden for the Legal Department.

According to a paper submitted to the Legislative Council Finance Committee, the problem will greatly increase in the near future when a Chinese text for all laws will double the paperwork.

The Legal and Printing Departments are asking for \$4.8 million in additional funds for hiring an unspecified number of qualified temporary staff to assist in the preparation of a new edition of the laws.

An extra \$14.5 million is being requested for the publication of the texts while \$9.7 million is needed for

special binders and paper for the new-style regulations.

Once the laws have been reprinted the Legal Department believes the new format will lower the cost of future revisions.

The Executive Council has already approved the proposal to introduce a loose-leaf edition of laws over a three-year period.

Currently laws are published both in the Government Gazette and in a consolidated annual edition. But most texts are updated through the publication of amendment slips designed to be cut out and pasted into existing ordinances.

Since 1965 the ordinances have grown from 14 to 32 volumes and considerable Government manpower has been devoted to pasting in small amendments to update the laws.

A special working group of law draftsmen identified the most pressing and urgent problems in keeping sets of the laws up to date.

Already, publication of the latest Annual Edition had been delayed and sub-

scribers are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up to date with the mass of paper, according to the Finance Committee paper.

But the working group decided the best way to resolve the problem was to replace existing texts with loose-leaf editions.

Not only would new legislation be able to slot into the loose-leaf files, it was also maintained the new system would need less than a seventh of the current total workforce.

But savings would be notional, it added, because the workload was shared among several departments.

Publication of the laws in both English and Chinese has already been delayed because of wrangles over the precise wording of statutes among members of the Bilingual Law Advisory Committee.

Publishing the first passage of Hongkong law in Cantonese is already a year behind schedule. It is hoped that the whole body of legislation will be completed before 1997.