

50pc doubt China will agree policy

By Political Correspondent
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HALF of Hongkong has given up hope Governor Mr Chris Patten will persuade China to drop its objections to his constitutional reform proposals during next week's visit to Beijing, an exclusive *Sunday Morning Post* poll has revealed.

But they urge Mr Patten to go ahead with his plans, even if it means sacrificing the post-1997 "through train", as well as the new airport at Chek Lap Kok.

The survey found 49 per cent doubt the Governor can persuade China to accept his plans during the October 21-23 trip.

Only 21 per cent - of the 425 people polled by Hongkong Polling and Business Research (PBR) - believe he will be able to persuade the Chinese. Thirty per cent were unsure.

Responding to the poll, Mr Patten pledged to try and prove it wrong.

"I hope the pessimists are confounded," he said.

But the Governor was satisfied with the finding that 56 per cent want him to push through his political development proposals, even if it makes the "through train" - under which legislators, elected in 1995, can remain in office after the change of sovereignty - impossible.

Only 19 per cent disagreed, while 25 per cent were unsure.

"There is a certain amount of self-confidence in that second answer that we can demonstrate to Beijing," he said.

The poll also found a majority ready to risk deadlock at Chek Lap Kok for the sake of political reform, although the number prepared to sacrifice the project was substantially smaller than the majority ready to derail the "through train".

Forty-nine per cent of those surveyed urged the

Governor to push on with his proposals for constitutional development, even it means further delays to the new airport, while 31 per cent disagreed and 20 per cent were uncertain.

And there was massive backing for Mr Patten's political development plans - involving an overhaul of Exco-Legco relations and more broadly-based elections in 1995 - with 73 per cent saying Beijing should endorse them. Eleven per cent disagreed, while 15 per cent were unsure.

Sixty per cent also thought the Governor had gone far enough towards meeting Hongkong's aspirations for more democracy. Twenty-three per cent disagreed, while 17 per cent were uncertain.

But there was far less certainty about Hongkong's future.

Only 47 per cent of those surveyed said they had become more confident in the territory's destiny beyond 1997 due to the October 7 policy speech.

This was almost matched by 45 per cent who declined to offer an opinion. But only eight per cent said they had become less confident.

PBR managing director Mr Citi Hung Ching-tin, who conducted the poll, said the results indicated popular support for Mr Patten's approach, coupled with continuing doubts over the territory's political prospects beyond 1997.

"It shows Hongkong is in a new relationship between the ruler and the ruled, but that people are still very pessimistic about the attitude of China," he said.

The poll also found unprecedented levels of support for the Governor's social policies.

An overwhelming 77 per cent said Mr Patten had ac-

corded high enough priority to education and welfare in his Legco address when he pledged to pump funds into both areas.

Only 13 per cent believed the Governor had not promised to spend enough in the two fields, while 10 per cent were unsure.

There was also surprising backing for the sewage charge to partly fund the multi-billion-dollar scheme to clean up the harbour that Mr Patten announced in his speech.

Fifty-nine per cent said they were prepared to pay a levy to help clean up the harbour. Thirty-two per cent objected, while 10 per cent were uncertain.

There was criticism of the other parts of the Legco address, with 51 per cent of respondents saying he had not done enough to combat inflation.

But 27 per cent believed the Governor had accorded high enough priority to fighting rising prices. Twenty-two per cent were unsure.

There was also muted disquiet at Mr Patten's axing of nine out of 14 members of Exco, with 42 per cent saying the Governor had acted unfairly in the way he removed former members of the inner cabinet.

A substantial 34 per cent saw nothing wrong in the way they were treated, while 24 per cent were uncertain.

And there was general apathy about Mr Patten's new line-up for Exco, which is now composed of professional non-political personalities, following its separation from Legco.

Sixty per cent had no opinion on the issue, 27 per cent believed this was better than the old line and 13 per cent thought it was worse.

The poll also found continuing majority support for the appointment of United Democrats such as Mr Martin Lee Chu-ming to Exco, despite the Governor's failure to do so last week.