

H. K. Standard

10 May 1983

Drive goes on to obtain home status

# Aid boost for our students in UK

HONGKONG and Britain have agreed on a multi-million-dollar fund to subsidise our students in the UK.

The two governments will contribute equally to the \$40 million scheme for the 1983-84 academic year.

The package, however, is seen as a compromise by the Hongkong government in demanding that local students be granted home status in Britain.

The Secretary for Education and Manpower, Kenneth Topley, told a news conference yesterday that at present, there was no hope for such home status.

"But I am not saying that it won't happen in the future," he added.

The British government waived home status for Hongkong students in 1980 and, as a result, Hongkong students have to pay eight to nine times higher than before. The average overseas tuition fee is currently about £3,000 a year.

The overseas status also means that many scholarships offered by British institutions are closed to Hongkong students.

The Hongkong government introduced an interest-free emergency loan for students at British universities in March 1981.

Mr Topley described the subsidy package as an extension of the loan



MR TOPLEY... no home status.

by **Wong Chiu-yan**

fund, which amounted to \$20 million last year.

Under the new agreement, the British government will contribute a maximum of £1.9 million. The Hongkong government will match this contribution on a dollar-for-dollar basis and the entire fund will amount to \$40 million.

If the total contribution by the two governments is smaller than what is actually required, each student covered by the package will receive

part of the subsidy in the form of a grant, and the amount falling short in the form of a loan.

The Hongkong government will foot the entire amount of the loan.

The package will cover Hongkong students working on first degree or polytechnic higher national diploma courses.

Students are required to undergo a means test to assess their eligibility for aid and the level of subsidy to be received.

Applications for subsidies will be administered by the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee in Hongkong and in Britain by the Hongkong government's London Office.

Mr Topley said it was difficult to estimate how many students would apply for assistance this year, but based on last year's figure, 1,000 students would be eligible.

The average subsidy per student is \$22,700 annually, which should be able to cover the difference between home and overseas tuitions.

Mr Topley said commitment for the following two years would be reviewed in light of actual costs in the first academic year.

"The British government has promised that next year's contribution will not be less than the £1.9 million in real terms," he said.

Mr Topley added that the means test would be conducted on the same lines as those for students at the two local universities and the Polytechnic.

The amount of subsidy granted to

a student will be calculated from the total disposable income of the student's family.

The subsidies will be paid directly to various British institutions.

Application procedures will be announced in a few weeks' time as soon as the package has been approved by the Legislative Council's Finance Committee.

Hongkong students in Britain have given a lukewarm response to the agreement.

Andrew Lam, immediate past president of the UK Federation of Hongkong Students, said, "It does provide relief to some students, but is quite different from what we have been fighting for."

## 'UNFAIR'

"It is an unfair practice of the British government to categorise Hongkong students under the overseas status," he said.

He pointed out that a student from Macau is granted home status in Britain because Portugal is a member of the EEC.

"The ties between Hongkong and Britain are much closer than those between Britain and other EEC members," he said.

Mr Lam added that there were about 5,000 students at British universities and the package could cover only one-fifth of all students.

He also criticised the government for being late in announcing the package as the deadline for applications at most British universities had passed.

Mr Lam, who is returning to Hongkong for the summer vacation, said his association would continue to fight for home status.