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1997 deal might rule out ministerial Government

By CHRIS YEUNG

The Sino-British pact on Hongkong's future might have ruled out the possibility of steering the post-1997 Government towards a ministerial system which would aid the development of political parties.

This is the opinion of Mr Henry Litton, QC, former chairman of the Bar Association.

He said last night that a ministerial system would provide entry for political party leaders to the Government system.

Mr Litton said: "If we do have political parties then those who guide them must have promise of real power which is to be exercised in a ministerial system."

Noting that the joint declaration is not clear on the

future political system, he said the stipulation that the principal officials of the Special Administrative Region Government should be nominated by the chief executive could mean the virtual ruling out of a ministerial system.

"If it did rule out (a ministerial system), then the whole project of developing political parties is futile," he told a Radio Television Hongkong news programme, *In My Opinion*.

Mr Litton was commenting on the view that China might have signalled disfavour on the formation of political parties in Hongkong.

However, parties are sure to develop, according to the other two panellists, SCM Post editor Mr Robin Hutcheon, and an Executive Councillor, Miss Maria Tam.

Mr Hutcheon said: "The

development of political parties will happen inevitably in a community like Hongkong which is moving towards self-rule and where direct elections are likely to be introduced.

"And though there will be different groups showing different labels and holding contrasting views they will eventually come under coalition.

"Most parties will have prosperity and stability of the territory as their main aim though their approaches might go in slightly different ways," he said.

Mr Hutcheon said he disagreed that Hongkong is too fragile and the people too immature for the setting up of political parties.

Miss Tam, chairman of the Progressive Hongkong Society, said the group may evolve into a political party.

The proliferation of political parties would be inevitable, she said.

Miss Tam said it would be best to have a coalition form of Government.

Political groups should work as effective trouble-shooters.

On another topic, Miss Tam said China's "one country, two systems" concept would be confirmed if an agreement securing the present system in Macau is reached after talks between Peking and Lisbon which will be held soon.

"I'm watching it with great interest," she said.

But Mr Litton said the news of the beginning of official talks on Macau's future was "a little bit disturbing."

"What we need now (for Macau) is the strengthening of the institution and improvement in its own system so that the path set now shall continue in the future.

"I see no reason why there should be high level talks at all.

"There's no point for the elimination of any concept of the three-legged stools principle," he said.

Mr Hutcheon said the beginning of talks on Macau's future was another step for the Peking leaders to unify the country.

They will concentrate on Taiwan once the Macau question is resolved, he said.

It was inevitable Peking would want to take the same steps and follow the same line on the question of Macau as were taken two years ago on Hongkong. Mr Hutcheon said.