

\$13m request may be dropped

By SHIRLEY YAM
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THE administration may withdraw its request for \$13 million in site investigation and design funding for Phase 3 of the Hongkong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) at today's Legislative Council Finance Committee meeting.

This follows a pledge by 34 legislators from the Co-operative Resources Centre (CRC) and the United Democrats to block funding.

While the United Democrats vowed to turn down the \$13 million grant, the CRC took an even more aggressive approach - threatening to block the total \$945 million sought to expand the seven tertiary institutions

under the umbrella of the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee.

Assistant Financial Secretary Mr Brian Bresnihan said the \$13 million item might be withdrawn because concerns had been raised by the education sector about too much funding for tertiary education.

He emphasised it had nothing to do with the current Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing on the cost overruns of Phase 1 and 2 of the HKUST.

The Director of Architectural Services, Mr Paul Corser, said in a discussion paper for legislators that any delay in the design of Phase 3 would mean a possible delay in the university's plan to increase student intake to

10,100 by the year 2000.

But Mr Bresnihan said he could not believe that would be a problem because it was known that the grants committee would undertake a review by 1993 on the expansion of higher education.

Should the item be withdrawn, Mr Bresnihan said it would be some time before it could be tabled again.

Speaking after the CRC's weekly meeting, member Mr Moses Cheng Mo-chi, said his colleagues thought it improper to approve funds to expand various tertiary institutions before the administration completed its review on demand for places.

"The existing estimated figures [on places] was accepted in principle," Mr

Cheng said. "We have to learn the latest demand before deciding whether the expansion is needed."

United Democrats vice-chairman Mr Yeung Sum yesterday reiterated the group's earlier decision to block funding for the preparatory work for Phase 3 of the HKUST.

The Democrats wondered whether expansion of tertiary education had been carried out too rapidly at the expense of students' academic quality and primary education, he said.

Meanwhile, Democrats leader Mr Martin Lee Chuming is to seek another PAC hearing on the cost overruns of the HKUST at the committee's next meeting.

THE United Democrats yesterday decided to meet the Financial Secretary, Mr Hamish Macleod, to express their concern over awarding the design contract on the Chek Lap Kok passenger terminal to the Mott consortium.

They will seek an explanation on the rationale behind choosing the group, whose tender bid was the highest among the three finalists.

Member Mr Albert Chan Wai-yip que-

ried whether the Government had chosen Mott because of its strong British interests.

If this was the case, he said, it would put undue pressure on the councillors to control the cost of the airport core projects.

"Besides, we don't want to send a wrong message to other foreign interests that the Hongkong Government would not consider their participation in the ports and airport projects," he said.