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10-chapter Basic Law, urges panel

THE first batch of Basic Law Consultative Committee members to discuss the framework of the post-1997 constitution suggested yesterday that the future Basic Law should consist of 10 chapters.

The 21 members attending the two-hour meeting said that there should be a preamble stating the background of the Basic Law as well as the spirit of the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Speaking after the meeting, the chairman of the group, Ng Hon-man, said the discussion was free and vigorous.

The views will be submitted to the full session of the Basic Law Consultative Committee on March 1, he said.

The 180 members of the Consultative Committee have been divided into six groups to conduct in-depth discussions on the issue. The other five groups will meet soon.

Mr Ng, who was elected chairman in the meeting, said members did not reach a conclusion on the framework of the constitution, but most of them agreed that there should be about 10 chapters.

Topics suggested included the preamble, relationship between the Central

Government and the future Special Administrative Region Government, political structure of the SAR Government, economic, cultural and religious obligations and rights, security and public order, emblem and flag of the SAR Government, and the power of interpretation and the process of amendment of the Basic Law.

Mr Ng said views on the political structure of the SAR Government and the security and public order topic were divided.

The most controversial point was whether security and public order should be defined in a separate chapter.

Some members said it should be included in the section on the relationship between the Central Government and the SAR Government because troops are controlled by the Central Government.

Others felt that since troops will be responsible for maintaining public order during unrest after 1997, the issue should be included in the defence and security of Hongkong.

Mr Ng said both views would be submitted to the full committee for consideration.