

1997 chief's power to be reduced

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CHINA wants the executive and the legislature in post-1997 Hongkong to be on an equal footing and be governed by "mutual checks and balances."

This was the official message brought back by a group from the Basic Law Consultative Committee who returned yesterday from Beijing after detailed discussions with senior Chinese officials on the drafting of the Basic Law.

The officials said the two branches should not have a subordinate-leader relationship. The chief executive should not enjoy as much power as that now accorded to present governors.

The remarks on the grey areas over Hongkong's future political system were made by Mr Li Hou and Mr Lu Ping, two of the top officials of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office under China's powerful State Council.

Mr Li's comments were revealed yesterday by the delegation's deputy leader, Mr Man Sai-cheong.

Mr Li, who is No 2 in the office headed by director Mr Ji Pengfei, said the future legislature should not have power to cast a no-confidence vote on the chief executive, nor should the chief executive be vested with the power to disband the legislature.

The Joint Declaration stipulates that the legislature shall be constituted by elections, and that the executive authorities shall abide by law and be accountable to the legislature.

Earlier, different interpretations over the term "accountable" stirred up controversy, and Chinese officials maintained that grey areas over the future political system in the Sino-British pact should be defined.

According to delegate Mr Chang Ka-mun, Mr Li said his definition of the future relationship was shared by the British and Chinese governments during negotiations on Hongkong's future.

They reached consensus on the meaning of some of the major terms used in the Joint Declaration, Mr Chang quoted Mr Li as saying.

According to Mr Chang, Mr Li defined the crucial term "accountability" in four areas. They were:

- The executive shall produce periodic policy reports to the legislature.
- The executive shall answer questions by the legisla-



Mr Li Hou

on a wide range of issues including political structure, the future Beijing and Hongkong relationship, residents' rights and obligations and the economy.

Delegation leader Dr S.Y. Zee said mainland officials and members were willing to speak on a number of sensitive issues.

According to delegate Mr Fung Kin-kee, Mr Lu said the future chief executive and secretary-level officials did not have to be members of the Chinese Communist Party.

On the controversial relationship between the constitutions of Hongkong and China after 1997, Mr Li reportedly favoured stating clearly that the affairs of Hongkong shall be confined by the Basic Law.

It avoids any application of clauses in the Chinese Constitution to Hongkong people after 1997.

Dr Zee quoted Mr Lu as saying that any discussions on party politics should consider whether it would be conducive to the well-being of Hongkong after 1997.

Mr Lu also said the future political system should be able to cater to the interests of different sectors of the community.

Hongkong delegates believe the Chinese officials favour direct elections to the future legislature.

The mainland officials showed special interest in previous elections, such as the Urban and Regional Council elections, Mr Man said.

Meanwhile, a vice-chairman of the Drafting Committee would raise the questions of freedom of foreign remittance and low taxation rate at a meeting of a sub-group on economics which he will join.

Mr Ann said he would also propose writing into the Basic Law, in legal terms, the guarantee for the maintenance of Hongkong's capitalist system for 50 years.

ture over government policies.

- The legislature shall be vested with powers to scrutinise government budget and approve expenditure.

- The legislature shall be vested with powers to impeach the chief executive and officials of secretary rank who have committed a crime and report to the Central Government in Beijing.

Another delegate, Mr William Tsui, quoted Mr Li as saying the future chief executive should not be merely a symbolic leader, but enjoy "certain" powers in administration.

Mr Li told delegates that the Chinese Government has yet to decide the scope of the chief executive's powers.

He said the future legislature should be constituted by members, through both direct and indirect elections but details were to be hammered out after wide consultations.

The 13-member delegation have held discussions with top Chinese officials including Mr Ji and mainland members of the Drafting Committee during their three-day stay in Beijing.

Members gave their views