

# \$3m earmarked to promote Basic Law

By STANLEY LEUNG

THE Basic Law Consultative Committee plans to spend at least \$3 million on a public awareness campaign for the first draft of the Basic Law, which is due out early next month.

The price tag on the committee's five-month consultation exercise was revealed at a general meeting yesterday by the secretary-general, Mr Leung Chun-ying.

Mr Leung denied speculation that the budget would be as low as \$1 million.

The total cost would have been as high as \$10 million if television and radio stations had not committed themselves to running free advertisements to promote the draft, he said.

In comparison, the consultation exercise conducted last year by the Government for the Green Paper on political reforms cost several tens of million dollars.

A report on "the working principles and plan for the consultation period" tabled yesterday for discussion at the BLCC meeting came in for criticism from some members.

One member, Mr Lee Wing-

tat, questioned the adequacy of resources to promote the crucial draft mini-constitution and to collect public opinions.

Members hotly debated the possibility of the BLCC granting financial subsidies to social and grassroots groups, whose plans to collect views might be handicapped by a lack of funds.

Members including Mr Mak Hoi-wah and Mr Fung Kin-kee insisted the BLCC should subsidise those groups which experienced financial problems if the consultation exercise were to be as extensive as possible.

But two other members, Mr Stephen Cheong and Mr Howard Young, questioned the proposal to subsidise outside projects and groupings.

Mr Young said granting subsidies might pose a question of fairness in selecting which organisations to be funded.

Mr Cheong noted that no such subsidies were granted by the Government as far as the Green Paper was concerned.

Some members, recalling the fuss surrounding the Green Paper findings, called for publication of the criteria to be adopted by the committee in dealing with views aired by the public.

Mr Lee suggested the BLCC

should spell out the criteria to be applied to the different forms of opinions, namely those from individuals, organisations, rallies or signature campaigns.

Another member, Mr Anthony Ha Man-ho, proposed the BLCC should appoint international jurists experienced in common law to comment on the Basic Law draft. So far, he said Chinese legal experts actively involved in the drafting work were acquainted only with the socialist laws of China.

Mr Leung said they did not want to encourage the proliferation of signature campaigns. Nevertheless, the way signatures were collected should be included as a reference for the drafting committee.

Two leading lawyers, Mr Denis Chang and Mr Anthony Rogers, criticised the consultation plan for lacking emphasis on legal problems. They suggested that one of the phases of consultation should deal with legal aspects.

● Legislative and Executive Councillor Maria Tam Wai-chu was re-elected yesterday as the chairman of the influential political group, the Progressive Hong-kong Society.

The group, which was found-

ed three years ago by Miss Tam to support the implementation of the Joint Declaration, has emerged as one of the most powerful, low-profile political bodies in the territory.

It counts among its nearly 200 members, two Basic Law drafters (Miss Tam and Dr Raymond Wu), 15 Basic Law Consultative Committee members, two Legco members (Mr Chung Pui-lam and Mr Edward Ho), 41 elected and 11 appointed district board members, leading labour unionists and other professionals.

The new executive committee has been expanded from 11 to 15 members with the number of vice-chairmen increased from one to three.

The three new vice-chairmen, Mr Lester Kwok, Mr David Young Fook-kwong, a district board member, and Mr Chung Pui-lam, will specialise in finance, planning and personnel respectively.

Other than the six office bearers, executive members include such influential figures as BLCC vice-chairmen Dr Philip Kwok and Mr Li Kai-ming, BLCC secretary-general Mr Leung Chun-ying, Mr Edward Ho, Dr J.K. Lee and Miss Veronica Wu.