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1997 agreement: 'The earlier the better'

A former Legislative Councillor and now a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Mr K.S. Lo, has called for an early Sino-British agreement on Hongkong's future.

The earlier an agreement is arrived at, the more effective it would be in stabilising the situation in the territory, Mr Lo told a forum on the future of Hongkong on Saturday.

The resolution of Hongkong's future is the key to prosperity and stability, he said. Once stability is evident there would be more reinvestment in factories and machinery.

This would help provide more jobs which in turn would help boost the sale of consumer goods and flats.

Mr Lo stressed that China highly values Hongkong investment, management techniques and technology, in terms of its own modernisation needs.

At the same time China would also hope to win international credence by respecting the agreement on Hongkong.

He urged the Hongkong people to give more attention to present day reality and not succumb to rumours and speculations.

Mr Lo said he approved of the Green Paper on representative government. Indirect representation, he said, would be in line with the requirements of the present society.

Another CPPCC member, Mr Ho Sai-chu, was more reserved in his views on the Green Paper.

He would not give any assessment of the merits of the proposed representative government, saying one could only assess the results after it had been in practice for eight or nine years.

However, Mr Ho noted that change in any political system is bound to have some repercussions.

Thus, any proposed changes must be based on the principle of maintaining prosperity and stability.

Mr Ho suggested the public must fully understand the proposals before any meaningful public opinion can be obtained.

On the Government's plan for a monitoring committee to gather public opinion, Mr Ho said this did not mean any distrust has emerged between Britain and China.

Rather, he believed the committee was

being established to report back to the British Parliament.

He also believed China would not set up a similar committee in Hongkong, stressing that there are already several channels through which Hongkong public opinion could be conveyed to Peking.

Meanwhile, a local newspaper owned by another CPPCC member, has asked why the Government has proposed a more representative government.

The Tin Tin Yat Po said China had already made it clear it would not be responsible for any such proposition — an indication that China does not favour such a system after 1997.

It alleged the proposition was put forward to consolidate the position of certain groups of people during the transition period.

An editorial in the Ming Pao newspaper said if the proposed joint working group is set up purely as a routine liaison body between China and Britain, then it would be useful and constructive.

But the group should be formed under certain conditions, it said. These were:

● The group should serve purely as a

liaison body between China and Britain, and should definitely not be any administrative body that monitors Hongkong's affairs.

● The members of the group should be equal in number as well as in status.

● The status of the principal British representative of the group should be lower than that of the Hongkong Governor and he must not be empowered to command the Hongkong Government. The British members of the group should report only to the British Government.

● The meeting venues of the group could initially alternate between London and Peking and later between Shumchun and Macau.

The editorial said if the proposed joint liaison body evolves from the present joint Sino-British working group and continues the cordial co-operation and the spirit of speedily resolving any problem, then it would very likely contribute to maintaining Hongkong's stability and prosperity.

On the other hand, should it interfere in Hongkong affairs, it would have a negative effect.

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