

Advisers to 'help avoid conflict'

From KENT CHEN
in Beijing

CHINA-appointed Hongkong affairs advisers would be charged with the responsibility of explaining Beijing's policy towards the territory to facilitate mutual understanding, according to Chinese Prime Minister, Mr Li Peng.

Speaking to businessman, Mr Tsui Tsin-tong, at a dinner reception last night, Mr Li said the advisers could act as a bridge between the mainland and Hongkong.

Mr Li said with the appointment of the 44 advisers, the additional channel of communication between China and Hongkong could help reduce misunderstanding and the possibility of conflict between the two places.

The role as a bridge is one of the four-point terms of reference given by the Chinese authorities, although these have not been formally announced for fear that it might cause concern in Hongkong over the role of the advisers.

Mr Tsui said when he was invited by Chinese officials to become an adviser, he was told that if Hongkong people did not understand China's position, the advisers could talk to the Chinese authorities and then explain their position to the Hongkong people.

But some advisers privately said they were reluctant to carry out the role of explaining mainland policies to Hongkong especially if these were unpopular in the territory.

Others said that it was not the responsibility of advisers to appear to defend the policy of the central Government and felt their job was to provide their own views on certain issues.

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- Chinese tea in the Great Hall

The other three unwritten terms of reference were: reflecting the views of Hongkong people, taking part in discussions on special topics and providing opinions on matters relating to the transition to 1997.

Earlier, during yesterday's half-hour swearing-in ceremony, attended by Mr Li Peng and President Mr Yang Shangkun, vice-premiers Mr Wu Xueqian, Mr Zhu Rongji, and Mr Zou Jiahua, Mr Li thanked the advisers for their contribution in helping to settle the Hongkong issue in accordance with the "one country, two systems" concept initiated by patriarch Mr Deng Xiaoping.

On Hongkong, Mr Li said the 1990s was an important period for the promotion of the country's reunification and only five years left before Beijing resumed sovereignty.

In his opening speech, Director of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office, Mr Lu Ping, said that China would like the advisers to use their years of experience in territory affairs to provide a wide range of opinions in helping China to improve its Hongkong policy.

Mr Lu said the advisers would not necessarily be appointed to the preparatory committee for the Hongkong Special Administrative Region.

He also stressed that the advisers were invited in their personal capacity, in what was seen as an attempt

HK group set 'to act as bridge'

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to allay fears that the advisers would become a second power centre.

"In future, the invitation of advisers will be carried out in stages and in batches. We look forward to seeing more people join the ranks of the Hongkong affairs advisers," he said.

Today, the advisers will meet Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Mr Jiang Zemin at the Great Hall of the People. The meeting will take place in the East Gate Room, which will be earmarked for the use of Hongkong delegates after Hongkong returns to China's rule in 1997.

A member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Mr Xu Ximin, said he would ask Mr Jiang to invite liberals as candidates.

After a brief discussion with Mr Zhou Nan on Tuesday night, Mr Xu said liberals might be included in a second batch of advisers yet to be named. But he said China would not consider any liberals who were members of the executive committee of the Hongkong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China.

A vice-director of the New China News Agency Hongkong branch, Mr Qin Wenjun, agreed that China would consider all sorts of people in its next appointment list except those who wanted to topple the Chinese Government.

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