

Advisers meet in Shenzhen to tackle airport

BY RAIN REN

HONGKONG affairs advisers start a special meeting in Shenzhen today on the airport funding row and the territory's political development.

About 20 Beijing-appointed advisers will arrive today and tomorrow to meet Cheng Zhiying, the deputy director of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office in Beijing, and other officials from the local office of the Xinhua News Agency.

The invitation comes as China steps up consultation with people in Hongkong over a whole range of issues, including the airport, the 1995 elections and appointments to the Executive Council.

This week, Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office chief Lu Ping said he wanted to hear the opinions of Airport Consultative Committee (ACC) members, who claim their efforts to scrutinise the new airport projects are largely ignored by the Hongkong Government.

Mr Lu's comments were in reply to a letter from ACC chairman Wong Po-yan — also a Beijing adviser — complaining that committee views were not being sought.

One of the advisers to go to Shenzhen, Liu Yiu-chu, said she intended to suggest that Beijing provide an alternative plan to settle the airport dispute.

"Endless meetings can solve no problems," she said.

"The Government should also provide new plans which show the new airport is really cost-effective."

Another adviser, Hongkong Federation of Trade Unions chairman Cheng Yiu-tong, was not optimistic about a quick end to the airport row.

He said things would be much easier if problems were purely financial.

"But now it seems not. So we have to wait and see," he said.

"I think the Government should work out a lower-cost plan."

"The Provisional Airport Authority (PAA) has already showed it can make it less expensive."

The PAA announced on Monday it would trim \$150 million off the cost of the airport by moving the passenger terminal building and runways westwards.

Ms Liu said she would suggest Beijing carefully watch what Governor Chris Patten would do to the Executive Council and the Legislative Council.

Mr Cheng said Mr Patten's decision on the Executive Council structure did not matter very much because there was no through train beyond 1997 for Exco members.

He said the Basic Law already stipulated the qualifications of Legislative Councilors who wished "to get on the through train".

It is understood Mr Lu will hold another meeting with advisers early next week.