

Advisers split on Beijing proposal

From FAN CHEUK-WAN
and CHRIS YEUNG
in Beijing

CHINA-APPOINTED Hongkong affairs advisers were divided on Beijing's plan to set up a working group to prepare for the establishment of the territory's "new kitchen" or post-1997 political structure.

New World Development's chairman Mr Cheng Yu-tung urged Beijing to postpone forming the group because the Hongkong public still wanted Britain and China to hold talks.

Tycoon Mr Li Ka-shing also said he hoped Beijing would not set up the body unless it was forced to do so.

Legislative Councillor Mr Allen Lee Peng-fei indicated his "great reservation" about the working group plan, which he maintained would give an impression that there would no longer be co-operation between China and Britain.

The new batch of 49 Hongkong affairs advisers yesterday received their certificates at a ceremony attended by premier Mr Li Peng and President Mr Jiang Zemin.

Sir David Akers-Jones, one of the longest-serving civil servants in Hongkong, received the longest round of applause when he received a letter of appointment to serve the Chinese Government.

But after the former chief secretary accepted the offer at the ceremony in the Great Hall of the People he was challenged about his "patriotism" by a foreign journalist who suggested he had shown a switch of loyalty.

Sir David hit back: "Certainly not. It's quite the re-

verse. It's been patriotic to do so."

On the plan for a "new kitchen", Sir David urged China to clarify details of the working group as soon as possible, adding "delay will cause more unease".

When asked if he would take part in the planned Hongkong Special Administrative Region (SAR) preparatory committee, Sir David said it would be difficult to comment until after details such as its composition and functions were available.

The plan became the focal point of talks between the advisers and mainland officials led by Mr Lu Ping, Director of the State Council's Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office, and Mr Zhou Nan, head of Hongkong's New China News Agency.

During two group discussions, most of the 49 advisers present lent their support to Beijing's plan to set up a working group to prepare for the setting up of the preparatory committee for the establishment of the SAR.

They either voiced their opinions and concerns on the pre-preparatory body or called on Beijing to clarify details of the new set-up.

An adviser and a former Hongkong official, Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai, quoted Mr Lu as saying that Beijing wanted to listen to different opinions before taking a decision on details such as the composition and the time and place for the setting up of the working body.

Mr Wong, who resigned from the Government to join the private sector, said colleagues in his group maintained that the new working body should not undermine the authority of the British administration.