

# A-G accused of employing scare-tactics

**A**TTORNEY-GENERAL Jeremy Mathews was accused yesterday of wasting taxpayers' money and employing scare tactics to suppress news stories by using contempt of court laws.

In the Legislative Council, liberal legislators Emily Lau and Martin Lee were supported by Conrad Lam and Centre for Co-operative Resources member Ronald Arculli in a challenge to the Government's use of contempt laws.

Miss Lau asked why Mr Mathews had delayed his decision to drop contempt charges against a newspaper and a magazine, 14 months after he had requested proceedings be initiated in the Supreme Court.

In a tense series of responses Mr Mathews said the two publications had written articles on cases involving large scale commercial fraud, which had not yet come to court in October and November 1990.

He initiated contempt proceedings "which had taken much longer to come to trial than originally anticipated".

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Reports by Louis Ng, Agnes  
Cheung and Chow Ming-fai

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Mr Mathews said: "I was aware in the intervening period both papers had exercised great care."

United Democrat Martin Lee challenged Mr Mathew's version and said that one of the publications employed a Queen's Counsel from London who advised the newspaper that the contempt charges would be thrown out of court.

Supported by Miss Lau, he asked why Mr Mathews did not accept such advice earlier which would have saved legal bills which must be paid by the taxpayers.

The Attorney-General said "the main factor which influenced my decision in December 1991 to withdraw proceedings was the care exercised by both newspapers in the year between the publication of the articles and the case coming to trial.

"I could see no point in incurring the costs of a full trial."