

GOVERNMENT — HK LAND 'PACT' LIMITS NEW GPO'S HEIGHT

THE new General Post Office building would have been 30 stories high if it were not for an agreement with Hongkong Land, owners of Connaught Centre.

This agreement made by the Government with Hongkong Land in 1971 stipulated that no building to the north of the Connaught Centre would be built higher than 120-feet — or five stories.

Hongkong Land insisted on the clause because they did not want the view of the harbour from Connaught Centre, to be obstructed by any tall buildings.

The Government agreed to the stipulation because it wanted to get the top price for the land.

And Hongkong Land would not have paid that price had the Government not agreed to their demands.

Senior architect and sole designer of the new GPO, Mr K.M. Tseng, today told The STAR that the Government in 1967 planned a building to include five floors for the GPO and 25 floors for Government offices.

At that time there was no plan to sell any property for commercial use, according to Mr Tseng.

"But the plans for the Central district were changed to include a commercial centre," Mr Tseng said.

"They were changed purely to give the Government increased revenue from the sale of land to private companies."

Mr Tseng said that the Government got a "record" price for the Connaught Centre land.

"The Government made the agreement not to build any building higher than 120 feet just to get that premium price even though they knew they would be short of general office space without the extra 20 to 30 floors."

Mr Tseng said the foundations of the new GPO were built to take two additional floors on top of the present five.

"That would bring the building up to the 120 feet limit."

Mr Tseng said there were no immediate plans to add two more floors.

Mr Tseng began designing the GPO building in 1969 and by 1971 had drawn up a set of "serious plans" for the building.

"The GPO is a simple, forward statement of what goes on inside the building," Mr Tseng said.

"From the ground one can see inside while the exterior design suggests the functions performed on each floor."

"The ground floor is the posting section while the double height and spaciousness of the first floor suggests the main public hall and central area of the building.

"The blank walls of the second floor suggest the housing of machinery — the guts of the new system."

"The small windows of the third and fourth floors suggest office spaces. Inside the two floors are divided into offices by concrete fins suggesting flexibility to meet any change in needs.

"I tried to make the building functional and truthful, an expression of what goes on within the concrete walls," Mr Tseng said.

The new GPO also houses the first central vacuum cleaning system in Hongkong.

Vacuum cleaners without individual motors can be plugged in to pipe outlets in each room.

These pipes are connected to a central unit in the GPO's basement which serves as a vacuum suction device.

Mr Tseng explained that this system saves time because all floors can be cleaned at once and the waste is sucked into a central system thereby eliminating the need to empty each vacuum cleaner as in domestic systems.

And the central vacuum cleaning system has a much higher sucker capability than ordinary systems, according to Mr Tseng.