

356,000 passports needed for HK 'functional core'

By WONG JOON SAN

HONGKONG will need almost double the number of passports offered by the British Government to retain its "functional core" of the labour force, according to a recent survey.

The survey estimates 96,200 household heads make up the functional core at present, which means the number of passports required to keep them and their family members in Hongkong would be 356,000.

Foreign Secretary, Mr Douglas Hurd, announced in the House of Commons on December 20 that a nationality package is being considered for a maximum of 50,000 heads of household and their families in Hongkong.

The survey was commissioned by the Right Of Abode Delegation (ROAD).

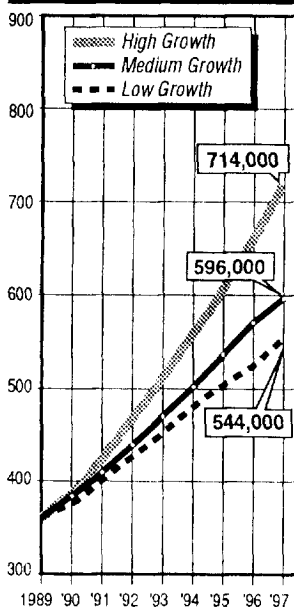
A ROAD member, Mr Donald Yap, who is also Hongkong Law Society president, said yesterday: "If Hongkong's stability and prosperity are to be maintained, it is necessary that this functional core be retained and the British Government consider increasing the number of 'insurance policies' for the people of Hongkong.

"ROAD maintains that it is Her Majesty's Government's moral and constitutional obligation to restore full British citizenship and passports to all her British subjects in Hongkong."

Asked whether the survey was a futile exercise since the British Government had announced that the 50,000 British passports proposal for household heads was final, Mr Yap said: "The Government can change its mind.

"When one is talking about insurance policies, that is, retaining the functional core, it doesn't mean only British passports. The international community, through the request of the British Government, also should be granting rights of abode to Hongkong people

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without them having to leave Hongkong.

"If the 50,000 passports proposal is approved and those who receive them stay to work for the stability and prosperity of Hongkong, then we could ask for some more to prevent others from leaving."

Asked whether the survey results contradicted another survey commissioned by Honour Hongkong campaign chairman, Mr Simon Murray, which said Hongkong's economy would collapse if 315,000 key professionals were not given foreign passports, Mr Yap said it was complementary rather than contradictory as ROAD's survey was in greater detail, covering the whole community.

He said Mr Hurd, who was given a copy of the survey at a luncheon yesterday, had expressed his interest in it.

The survey was carried out by three Chinese University lecturers, Dr Stephen Tang Lung-wai, Dr Pak Wai-liu and Dr Paul Kwong.

Outlining the survey results, Dr Pak said the outflow of emigrants from

Hongkong had accelerated since 1987 and reached 45,800 in 1988 and was projected to increase to 55,000 this year.

"The professional occupations that are most seriously affected by emigration are lawyers, judges, system analysts, programmers, accountants, auditors, doctors, dentists, nurses, mid-wives, engineers, architects, surveyors, and general and production managers," he said.

The survey defined the functional core of an organisation as a small sub-group of employees which was essential to its normal conduct of business to the extent that if everyone in that sub-group resigned and emigrated at the same time, the organisation would cease to function.

The survey estimated the functional core of the labour force to be 130,200, representing 4.7 per cent of the entire force, Dr Pak said.

"Within this core, 96,200 are in the private sector, constituting 3.8 per cent of all employed persons in the private sector.

"The remaining 34,000 people are civil servants who constitute 18.3 per cent of the civil service," he said.

To estimate the number of heads of households in the functional core, the figure of 130,200 employed persons was adjusted for double counting arising from working husbands and wives, he said.

The figure was also adjusted to exclude those who already possessed the right of permanent residence in another country, he added.

After these adjustments, the final figure for the functional core was 96,000 and 356,000 for families.

This core figure was projected to grow to between 147,000 and 193,000 in 1997, depending on whether low, medium or high growth of the functional core was assumed, he said.

"Correspondingly the estimated number of passports required by 1997 ranges from a low of 544,000 to a high of 714,000," he added.