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300 rich families opt for S Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Three hundred wealthy Hong-kong families wanting to emigrate before the 1997 handover to China have applied to settle in South Africa, the Home Affairs Department said yesterday.

If approved, it would be the largest influx of ethnic Chinese to South Africa in decades and would swell the country's 11,000-strong Chinese population by more than a tenth.

The department said the families were "of the entrepreneurial middle class who own their own businesses or other enterprises and who have at their disposal liquid cash resources of not less than one million rand (HK\$3 million)".

The applications were being considered "in view of the industrial development and job creation which such a venture could generate", the department said.

First International Con-

tacts (FCI), the South African immigration consultants handling the applications, said the families wanted to buy land in the Johannesburg area where they could live together as a community.

FCI spokesman George Ford said in an interview the search for property got off to a bad start last month when the town of Springs, controlled by white rightists, refused their visa application.

But he later had favourable responses from five other municipalities.

The five include South Africa's wealthiest white suburbs. Their local governments are controlled by either anti-apartheid parties or the ruling National Party.

He said the project was taking advantage of recent changes South Africa has made to its European-oriented immigration policy to attract skilled people seeking to leave Hongkong. - Reuter