

1,000 more men to boost garrison

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The Hongkong garrison is to be shortly boosted from 8,000 to 9,000 with reinforcements from the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, the Special Raiding Section of the Royal Marines and two companies of Gurkhas.

Authoritative sources said yesterday Hongkong's share of the garrison upkeep will be 75 per cent with the remainder to be shouldered by Britain.

Reinforcements from the Paras will number 600, the Royal Marines 50 and the Gurkhas 240.

The bulk will be due here at the end of the month to be fully operational by the beginning of next month.

They will be brought here to help Hongkong in its efforts to stem the flow of illegal immigrants from China.

The Parachute Regiment is one of the elite units of the British Army and will provide the same tough, efficient support as the Royal Marines, though its role will be on land.

At the moment, a lull is being experienced on the illegal immigrants front, with the numbers arrested in the first five days of this month averaging between 40 and 60.

But in the past few days these have gone up to between 100 and 150.

The lull is a result of threats of much heavier punishments on the part of China (see story below right) as the country is trying to stem the flow of illegals.

The estimated number of illegal immigrants having found their way into Hong-

kong during the past year has been put at 120,000 and this has caused grave concern in the Government.

Officials said they would be surprised if the total population for Hongkong has not yet reached 5.5 million.

Illegals will be a major problem in the 1980s for Hongkong, whose domestic population growth rate at 1.7 per cent for the past two years has been described as quite comfortable by world standards.

Concerning Vietnamese boat refugees, officials re-

peated fears of another exodus from Vietnam, based on intelligence reports received.

They say that so far, nations that have promised to accept such refugees from Hongkong have not been keeping their promises.

Hongkong is being clearly discriminated against in comparison with the off-take rate of other countries such as Malaysia, they said.