

27 Nov. 1980

200 of HK's Gurkhas on way to Gulf

By JENNIFER COOKE

HONGKONG-based Gurkhas are being sent to the Gulf in their first potential military role since they confronted an Indonesian invasion force in Borneo more than 25 years ago.

The British Defence Minister, Mr Tom King, announced in the House of Commons that 200 men from the Gurkha Transport Regiment would fly to England in the next few weeks and then to the Gulf as part of Britain's increased commitment to the United States-led multinational force in Saudi Arabia.

They will drive trucks, ambulances and other support vehicles for the massive military force ranged against Iraqi troops occupying Kuwait.

The 200 are part of the 14,000 additional soldiers being committed with another brigade of 60 Challenger tanks, two Royal Navy mine-hunters and more combat aircraft.

They will join the 7th Armoured Brigade in northeastern Saudi Arabia where Britain already has 16,000 troops. Four-

teen ships and five air combat squadrons are also stationed in the Gulf area.

A joint forces public relations spokesman last night confirmed the inclusion of the New Territories-based Gurkhas, describing it as a simple deployment of a "modest contingent" from Hongkong's 8,700-strong garrison, of which up to half are Gurkhas.

He said he could not recall Hongkong being asked to provide troops since the ~~contingent in Borneo, which began in 1964~~ after Indonesia sent a small invasion force against the newly-formed Malaysia — comprising independent Malaya and the former British colonies of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak.

The Indonesians were unsuccessful largely due to British military support of Malaysia.

The latest move follows virtual silence from Japan after a political uproar over a proposal to send a contingent of up to 1,000 men which would have included about 100 lightly-armed soldiers, officials and civilians to the Gulf in a non-combat support role for multinational forces already there.