

~~/\$16m force to~~ tackle surge in illegal workers

A \$16-million task force will be set up soon to tackle surging illegal immigrants working in the territory.

Apart from combating the illegals' problem, members of the 100-man task force would also deploy to checkpoints during festivals, like Lunar New Year, to help process the drastic increase of visitors.

"We have already submitted our proposal for a 100-strong task force to tackle the surge of illegal workers in Hongkong," Immigration Department director Laurence Leung said.

"We are rather hopeful that the Government would give a favourable response to our plan. We hope to set up the task force within the course of this year."

According to Leung, 1992 was another hectic year for his department.

With the opening up of China and its increasingly symbiotic relationship with Hongkong, there was an increase in the pressure of work at the various checkpoints, especially during festive occasions and public holidays.

Last year, there was an upswing of 11.4 per cent in passenger traffic cleared by the Immigration Department to 77 million. This was an increase of 7.9 million over 1991.

Vehicular traffic passing through the various checkpoints rose by 13.3 in 1992 compared with the previous year.

Demand for visas surged by 34 per cent to 109,936 applications.

"Despite the increase in workload, the strength of the department has been kept at the 1989 level," Leung said.

"To cope with the problem of resource constraint and to maintain an acceptable level of service to the public, we carried out many policy and procedural reviews."