

Big fall in Canada applications

By BERYL COOK

THE number of Hongkong residents applying to migrate to Canada as independent and business migrants plummeted by 70 per cent last year.

Some Hongkong immigration consultants warn that the drop could be because migrants are looking for new destinations with faster processing and less restrictive selection than Canada.

However, a spokesman for the Australian Consulate General said the number of applications to migrate to Australia had also dropped.

A New Zealand Commission Immigration Service spokesman said applications had risen to 971 in the first six months of this year, compared with 313 for the same period last year. A total of 1,264 applications were lodged last year, but this

was too small to offset the drop in the Canadian figures.

Figures revealed to the *South China Morning Post* by the strategic planning and research branch of Canadian Employment and Immigration Statistics (CEIS) in Quebec, show the number of Hongkong residents who arrived in Canada dropped by 24 per cent from 29,261 in 1990 to 22,317 last year.

And Canadian Commission figures showed the number of applications from Hongkong residents dropped by half from 18,672 in 1990 to 9,428 last year.

Applications lodged in Hongkong had dropped by two-thirds in the independent category from 3,456 in 1990 to 1,123, and business migration applications also by about two-thirds from 4,413 in 1990 to 1,358.

Both categories affect Hong-

kong's brain drain because independent migrants are selected largely on education, skills and occupational demand, while business migrants have skills and money to invest.

A CEIS spokesman said the 1991 figures were preliminary, but were not expected to vary much when they were confirmed in two weeks.

The spokesman also said Hongkong residents were waiting 161 days before they used their visas.

This is 20 days longer than last year, and almost twice as long as visa-holders from other countries who tend to use them within 88 days.

The portion of Hongkong residents who did not use their visas before they expired had also reached an "historic" low of 6.4 per cent, he said.

The Government, business com-

munity and some immigration consultants said the statistics could indicate that confidence in Hongkong has been restored because of the time lapse after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, and the healthy economy.

A government spokesman welcomed the possibility of a downturn in the brain drain, but said the period was "too short to establish a trend".

The director of the Hongkong Chamber of Commerce, Mr Ian Christie, said: "More Hongkong people are realising that migration is an expensive business and that taxation is high in Canada. With recession, professionals also have had to take unskilled and semi-skilled jobs.

"They are thinking twice about

(Cont'd on Page 3, Col 1)

Big drop in Canada applications

(Cont'd from Page 1)

going - which is good news in terms of Hongkong's brain drain."

One Hongkong businesswoman who has seen the turnover of her billboard and neon-sign business expand into China and grow 400 per cent since 1990 found the decision hard to make.

"Just after June 4 everyone was applying to go to Canada and I did too. The time limit was up on my permit last month. I had to de-

former local residents returning after gaining overseas passports.

"It is impossible to get accurate statistics because some ex-Hongkong residents enter on Canadian passports and some people entering on Hongkong identity cards also have Canadian passports, but we suspect that a large number are actually returning to work here. They go away to get passports but they come back to fill their rice bowls as many times as they can before

1997," one immigration worker said.

By July 7 this year, 15,681 Hongkong migrants had arrived in Canada, indicating the trend had already bottomed out and the rate of total migration to Canada by the end of the year could be almost back up to 1990 levels.

But the trends indicate that the increase is likely to come mostly from the family category, rather than the independent and business ones.