

# Accusations fly over appointment of buildings chief

THE Government was yesterday accused of misleading legislators in the row over the appointment of the Director of Buildings.

Deputy Secretary for Works Tony Samson — who was the front-runner to head the department — said it was wrong to suggest the hunt for a professional candidate had just begun.

Secretary for the Civil Service Michael Sze Cho-cheung told the council yesterday that the recent appointment of a non-professional outsider as the new director would not hamper the promotions prospects of staff.

## CIVIL SERVICE

"The objective was to find the best candidate for the job," he said.

Mr Samson has said the fact that he was not appointed was a "miscarriage of justice". The department's engineers had insisted that a local be named to the post, accusing Mr Samson of mismanagement.

Yesterday, Mr Sze repeated that there was no political consideration in the appointment of Helen Yu Lai Ching-ping.

"No one was considered fully ready to take up the new post at this stage. It was accordingly decided that, as an interim solution, an experienced Administrative Officer should be posted to head the new department.

"The appointment of an administrative officer should not affect the promotion prospects of the professional staff in Buildings Department."

Mr Samson said yesterday that he was disappointed that Mr Sze had distorted the true picture in his reply to legislators.

He said the Government had

spelled out a firm commitment to find a professional to head the office years ago.

"They have decided to select some senior professionals for the grooming exercise and I was identified two years ago," he said.

Mr Samson said the Government's handling of the issue would damage the morale of the professionals working in the department.

"Mr Sze's statement is certainly erroneous. He is looking at a situation without me," he said.

"Obviously the staff's morale

would be affected if the leading professional was thrown out of the office," he said.

He said he would write to Mr Sze to clarify all the "misleading" points he had made at Legco.

Mr Sze also told legislators that Mrs Yu's priority would be to review the succession plan in the department.

Legco representative of architects, surveyors and planners Edward Ho Sing-tin questioned the competence of a non-professional to head the office, which is the highest building authority in Hong Kong.

But Mr Sze said that the building authority itself was an office and the head of the department did not necessarily need to perform professional duties.

"Recalling my own experience as Director of Marine, I, too, was a pilot-age authority and I do not know how to pilot a ship," he said.

Mr Samson launched a formal appeal to Governor Chris Patten last month but has received no reply.

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