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10,000 to be recruited to civil service

By STANLEY LEUNG

THE Hongkong Government aims to expand the civil service by 10,000 from March — the highest growth rate for many years.

Although it wants to recruit another six per cent in the current financial year, the acute labour shortage in the territory appears to be frustrating the administration's plans as only 5,000 posts have been filled so far.

As a result, the Government may have difficulty in filling all the remaining 5,000 posts in the next four months.

In his budget speech last March, Financial Secretary Piers Jacobs estimated the need for a four per cent expansion in the civil service — mainly to staff some major new medical facilities and to bolster the Police Tactical Unit as the British garrison is gradually withdrawn.

However, there is no sign that the current labour shortage will be solved especially when the Government has overruled the proposal to import foreign labour.

A loss in professionals mainly through emigration

to foreign countries is another headache for the administration.

The *South China Morning Post* reported on Saturday that the Royal Hongkong Police had been hit by an alarming 55 per cent increase in the number of officers quitting the force.

Statistics showed that an average of 140 officers were leaving each month.

At the same time last year, the rate at which the force was losing staff was only 90 a month.

The Government, therefore, has to cope with a wastage rate of seven per cent in the police force and three per cent in the entire civil service, while attempting to meet its expansion targets.

In April, there were about 183,000 Government employees.

The expansion by six per cent will be the largest annual growth in recent years, particularly in view of the fact that the Government has adopted a belt-tightening policy on the growth of the civil service in the wake of economic recessions.

The biggest increase in recent years was in 1981/82 when the civil service grew by 9.7 per cent.

When Mr Jacobs fore- cast in March that the ser-

vice would grow by four per cent, that figure was regarded as high considering the Government had aimed for zero and 2½ per cent in the past few years.

The current expansion is the result of comparatively higher economic growth over the past few years and is seen as a "compensation" for the low growth years.

Both Mr Jacobs and the Governor, Sir David Wilson, have cautioned against excessive growth in the public service.

"There are potentially serious implications if such a high growth rate of four per cent in the size of civil service were to continue."

In his second annual speech last month, Sir David said the number of civil servants has grown over the past five years by an annual average of 1.7 per cent.

"Of itself, that rate of increase is not particularly worrying, but there are signs that the rate of growth is accelerating."

To keep the balance between the public and private sectors, Sir David called for improvements in the civil service's productivity.

There were also worries that a six per cent growth in the public service would bring further inflationary pressure on the economy.