

100 Govt officers live in hotels

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ABOUT 100 Government officers are now living in luxury hotel rooms and suites.

The Government has allocated \$4 million of the taxpayers' money which will provide temporary accommodation for civil servants for the current financial year.

The Director of Protocol, Brigadier R. G. Lewthwaite, has been living in a \$350-a-day suite for more than three years.

A Government spokesman said yesterday these officers were being accommodated in hotels temporarily, "awaiting the allocation of appropriate quarters."

The Protocol chief, his wife and daughter have been living at the Hongkong Hotel in Tsimshatsui since October 15, 1969.

The suite's rent costs taxpayers about \$10,000 a month - without special concession rates offered by the hotel to the Government.

About 50 other Government employees and their families are also staying at the same hotel, the Sunday Post Herald learnt last night.

Brig Lewthwaite, however, is the only Government official who has occupied one of the hotel's most expensive suites for such a long period, it was revealed.

The costs for other suites range from \$165 to \$260 a day.

Hotel officials said the Government concession rates average about 20 per cent off the regular price.

The Government spokesman said Brig Lewthwaite paid 7½ per cent of his salary to the Government towards the cost of the hotel suite.

He admitted that Brig Lewthwaite did not qualify for hotel subsistence allowance which may be claimed by officers awaiting the allocation of a flat.

About half the 100 officers now staying in hotels had already been allocated quarters and would move into them shortly, the spokesman added.

An Urban Councillor, Mr Charles Sin,

lashed out last night at the high costs of living quarters contributed by taxpayers to Government officials.

"Something has gone very wrong somewhere," he said.

"Rent charged by a private landlord would cost less than the \$10,000 a month at the moment.

"The Government should find accommodation commensurate to his position and thereby save the taxpayers' money."

On finding "suitable" private accommodation for the official, he said: "That statement cannot be right. Three years ago, especially, it would have been easy to find a decent flat for \$10,000 a month.

"Someone has been very negligent somewhere. This is a waste of taxpayers' money," he said.

A Legislative Councillor, Mr Wilfred Wong, said he knew that the Government did not have enough flats for their officers.

"As for the Director of Protocol, I cannot suggest anyone better suited to live in a hotel than he".

The Government spokesman gave two reasons why the Director of Protocol lived permanently in a hotel suite.

- His need to entertain.
- His need to be centrally located.

"Because of his duties the Director of Protocol must live close to main hotels and within easy reach of the airport," he said.

"There are few suitable Government owned or leased blocks which meet these requirements and, because of the continuing shortage of Government quarters, no such flat has been available for allocation to Brig Lewthwaite for the past 3½ years.

"This applies both to Kowloon and Hongkong side and is not effected by the opening of the cross-harbour tunnel, though this has to some extent facilitated the Director of Protocol's work," the spokesman said.