

506 expats hold top civil service posts

By KAREN CHENG

THE number of expatriate officers in the top echelons of the civil service has gone up over the past five years, despite government pledges to speed up localisation.

Union leaders yesterday reacted with disappointment, claiming this could jeopardise the prospects of locals who might otherwise be considered capable of taking greater responsibilities.

According to latest figures, the number of expatriates holding jobs at directorate level now totals 506 – a six per cent rise compared with 476 in 1987.

Although the ratio of expatriates to locals has dropped from a 48-52 percentage split in 1987 to the current 40-60, the actual increase in the number of expatriate directorate officers has caused concern.

The total number of local directors in the Government in 1987 was 521 compared with the present figure of 763.

Localisation has been slowest in the police force and Legal Department which have 70 per cent and 84 per cent of their directorate posts filled by expatriates respectively.

During the same period, the percentage of overall senior management posts – ranks immediately below di-

rectorate level – held by expatriates decreased from 30 to 24 but the actual number of posts increased by 30 per cent to 681.

The statistics were described as disappointing by the chairman of the Senior Non-Expatriate Officers' Association, Mr John Luk Woon-cheung, who criticised the Government for not being sincere in implementing localisation.

While accepting there had been an expansion of the civil service, he argued that this was not an excuse to recruit more expatriates.

"If the Government is sincere in giving locals more chances, the newly created posts should be filled by them rather than expatriates," he said.

Apart from the police and Legal Department, Mr Luk said a number of other departments, including marine, housing, architectural services and civil engineering, were also having difficulty in localising directorate posts.

He said the Government should consider seriously not renewing expatriates' contracts in a bid to hasten the pace of localisation.

"To our understanding, many expatriates are getting their contracts renewed and we hope the Government might cease this so that locals could have more pro-

motion chance," he said.

The chairman of the Marine Department Local Professional Officers' Association, Mr Lee Kai-leung, claimed expatriates were favoured for promotion.

"The present unsatisfactory situation is obvious if one sees that expatriates representing less than one per cent of the Department's staff constitute 60 per cent of the directorates," Mr Lee said.

"We are of the opinion that to date the Marine Department is one of the few government departments which has not done much in the implementation of the Government's localisation policy."

Principal assistant secretary of the Civil Service Branch, Mr Michael Waters, maintained that if a local officer was considered suitable for a post currently held by an expatriate they would not renew the contract of the overseas officer.

He said the Government had not relaxed any effort in filling top posts by locals but they would not compromise quality to obtain a greater pace of localisation.

"The policy of localisation is proceeding smoothly but in a way that there are adequate qualified officers because we need to maintain the standard of service," Mr Waters said.