

# '97 BLOW TO GOVT EXPATS

BY FLORA WONG

**M**ORE than 130 expatriate civil servants on contract terms have failed in their bid to become permanent Government staff after 1997.

An expatriate representative said expats on contract terms and without special skills were highly likely to be rejected because of the strict localisation process.

Under a transfer scheme that closed on 30 June, 538 expat civil servants with contracts applied to become permanent staff on pensionable terms.

A Government spokesman said 255 applications were approved, 137 were still under consideration and 15 had been withdrawn.

Contracted expatriates employed before 28 March 1985 and below the age of 45 on first appointment, or 50 if the applicant opted for the new pension scheme on transfer, were eligible to apply to be permanent civil servants beyond 1997.

"In view of the Joint Declaration it is no longer possible to guarantee overseas officers a full career," the spokesman said.

"Furthermore, the number of well-qualified local candidates is increasing and

correspondingly the need for overseas officers on a permanent basis has decreased."

The spokesman said that after the closing date on 30 June, expatriate civil servants with contracts could not become permanent staff in the run-up to 1997.

Many expats with contracts are in the Environmental Protection Department, the Judiciary, the Legal Department and departments under the Lands and Works Branch.

A Judiciary spokesman said schemes for civil servants did not apply to members of the Judiciary who were still able to apply for transfers.

Association of Expatriate Civil Servants of Hongkong vice-president Royston Griffey said it would be "a difficult hurdle" for candidates to prove they were irreplaceable.

"Individual departments have to certify that no suitable local candidates are available within five years," he said.

Mr Griffey said applications without departmental support could hardly be approved.

Local Non-expatriate Officers Association chairman John Luk criticised the Government for being "too slow" in localisation.

"More local staff should have access to higher positions," he said.