

100 expats to be eased out for localisation

By CATHERINE CHAN

ABOUT 100 expatriate officers will retire early to facilitate localisation of the civil service before 1997, according to the Secretary for Civil Service, Mr Barrie Wiggam.

Mr Wiggam would not reveal how much the officers would be paid, saying it would be difficult to predict.

Nor could he say how far down the ranks the compensation scheme would reach.

His remarks drew immediate criticism from Legislative Councillors who were already unhappy with the Government's sluggishness in localising the civil service.

United Democrat legislator Mr Cheung Man-kwong said: "The Government has a clear policy to compensate these officers, but we have not been told of the financial implications. This could be a bottomless pit."

His colleague, Miss Emily Lau Wai-hing, hinted she might oppose payments when the proposal reaches the Finance Committee.

Overseas officers can apply for compensation if they had not been promoted, or were asked to retire early.

Addressing members of the Legislative Council Public Service Panel, Mr Wiggam said the Government had made a "wild guess" at the

number of prospective recipients when it had introduced the compensation scheme in 1987.

To date, the Government has paid a total of \$20 million to 25 eligible overseas officers, mainly administrative officers or police officers.

Councillors were also dissatisfied with the progress of localisation and criticised comments suggesting there were not enough qualified local candidates.

"How can the Government say there is no qualified candidate available, or they do not measure up to overseas officers?" said Miss Lau.

"My understanding is that Hong Kong is considered to be a colony, which is why overseas officers are

preferred to local ones."

Mr Wiggam said in 1988, overseas officers took about 45 per cent of the directorate grade posts but this year, they accounted for only 33 per cent.

And 80 per cent of senior management and professional positions are manned by local officers.

"Individual overseas officers become frustrated when they are not promoted because of the localisation scheme," said Mr Wiggam, drawing a chorus of opposition.

Members claimed they had not asked the Government to wipe out all expatriate civil servants, but merely wanted localisation hastened.