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\$53m for senior officials' perks

By ANDY HO

THE Government has been given more than \$53 million to settle increased spending on senior officials' rentals, education allowances and other personal entitlements.

Of the amount approved by the Finance Committee yesterday, \$37 million was earmarked to raise the rates of its private tenancy allowance scheme for both local and overseas officers.

Legislator Mr Paul Cheng Ming-fun asked why the subsidy rate should go up while overall rental charges in Hongkong were projected to be dropping.

Miss Pauline Wong Poon, Chief Executive Officer of the Civil Service Housing

Section, explained that there had been a time lag as the Government projection was based on rental indices for the third-quarter of last year.

Based on the figures, the Commissioner of Rating and Valuation earlier advised that the allowances be increased by between 22 and 27 per cent from April 1.

Chief Secretary Sir David Ford, who chairs the Finance Committee, conceded that the arrangement was "not a very sensitive way of making adjustment".

The tenancy allowances are meant for officers receiving a substantive salary on or above point 38 of the Government's 51-slot Master Pay Scale. The sum cov-

ers rentals, service charges and car park fees.

Married officers with children who have been getting the maximum rate of \$16,700 will now be entitled to \$20,600.

The ceiling for single officers will be raised from \$13,360 to \$16,480.

Miss Wong told legislators that the Government was working on a comprehensive study to encourage officers to take up its home purchasing scheme rather than rely on private tenancy allowances.

Another \$14.5 million has been set aside to meet increased expenditure on local and overseas education allowances for officials.

The remaining \$2 million was approved to meet the average 21 per cent rent rises for officers posted to the Government's London office and a 16 per cent jump in the number of officers claiming furniture and domestic appliance allowances.

Meanwhile, 14 new senior civil service posts were created yesterday to ensure that the Government's massive port and airport schemes are completed on time.

The personnel package, with salaries of the new posts ranging from \$41,400 to \$57,100 a month, carries an annual price tag of almost \$8 million.