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5.5m eligible for passports

By Norma Connolly

UP to 5.5 million people will be eligible for SAR passports, which the Department of Immigration will begin issuing on 3 July.

Director of Immigration Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye announced yesterday that applications for the new passports would be accepted from 1 June, but because of manpower and machinery

restrictions, the first passports will not be issued until a month later.

From Tuesday, staff at the Immigration Department will hand the issuing and processing of British National (Overseas) (BNO) passports to the British Trade Commission.

"We will not issue any BNO passports after 1 April. After we have cleared all the

work (on the BNO), our staff will be deployed to handle SAR passport applications," Ms Ip said.

She said 3.4 million people in the territory would hold or have applied for BNO passports by the end of June.

Although the official date for the issuing of the first SAR passports is 1 July, this will be delayed as the first two days of July have been designated as public holidays.