

101 arrested for carrying drugs abroad

BY MAX KONG

A TOTAL of 101 Hongkong residents were arrested trying to carry drugs overseas last year, compared with 37 in 1990.

Narcotics Commissioner Ken Woodhouse said yesterday that between 1979 and last year, 649 Hongkong people were detained in more than 30 foreign countries for drug offences.

About half this number were currently in Thailand, Japan, the Netherlands, France and United States.

The 649 people arrested included 362 in the Asia-Pacific region, 76 in North America, nine in Latin America, 199 in Europe and one in Panama. The whereabouts of two Hongkong residents were unavailable.

On an average, one out of every two Hongkong residents detained overseas was between 21 and 30 years old at the time of arrest.

Mr Woodhouse attributed this to the money-oriented mentality of Hongkong's youth.

"They haven't settled down, many of them are not married. They would find the illicit, quick financial windfall attractive," he said.

Mr Woodhouse said some Hong-

kong citizens had been executed or were awaiting execution, mainly in Asian nations like China, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

He singled out Singapore as a typical country with "very severe punishment", where 18 Hongkong citizens, including five women, are in detention. Of the 18, five men and one woman await the mandatory death penalty.

Mr Woodhouse said most Hongkong people detained overseas were arrested in transit.

"Unscrupulous traffickers often take advantage of naive and innocent people for drug trafficking," he said.

"No matter what you are offered, whether it be a few thousand dollars or a free air-ticket, the price can be the loss of your freedom, or even your life, when you are caught."

Meanwhile, the number of active drug abusers in the territory at the end of 1991 totalled 39,642. This represented 0.8 per cent of Hongkong's population aged 11 and above, according to the latest statistics compiled by the Central Registry of Drug Abuse.

Of this number, one out of every 10 was female. The majority of abusers, 52.5 per cent, were in the 21-40 age bracket.