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2,000 foreign workers to be imported for building of new airport

MORE than 2,000 overseas workers will be allowed in Hongkong to build the Chek Lap Kok airport and related projects, the Executive Council decided yesterday.

A special scheme has been drawn up to cater for the demand for labour caused by the \$40 billion airport projects.

Contractors will be able to bring in workers of all types, from engineers to construction staff, from next year.

The move is seen as

helping alloy contractors' fears that wages would spiral as a result of a labour shortage.

But construction workers' unions said the scheme would force down wages for local workers.

The Secretary for Econ-

omic Services, Anson Chan, had earlier said the Government would need to ensure adequate labour supplies to keep construction costs lower.

Exceptional arrangements, such as selective importation of construc-

tion workers on a project by project basis, had to be introduced, she said.

Government sources said the number of overseas workers at the initial stage of construction would be 2,000. When building work peaks dur-

ing 1993-94, more than 2,000 would be needed.

"The number also depends on the level of mechanisation," the source said.

The Executive Council considered that if no foreign workers were

brought in, Government expenditure and private investment would be forced up.

But the Construction Industry Employees General Union said the expected influx of overseas employees would hinder local construction workers in their fight for reasonable salaries.

Union chairman Poon

To-chuen said work standards could be affected as the imported workers might take time to catch up with the local labour.