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\$13m to ease passport workload

By CHRIS YEUNG

THE Government has set aside \$13.1 million for new posts and equipment in the Immigration Department to cope with expected increases in workload arising from naturalisations and applications for British passports in 1990-91.

The amount, representing a 23.6 per cent rise over the revised estimate for the current financial year that expires in April, covers an extra 130 posts and expenses for microfilming and office equipment.

According to Government estimates, the Naturalisation and Nationality Section has experienced a far greater workload since June 1989.

Draft applications for naturalisation received since the June 4 crackdown in Beijing last year represent a 650 per cent increase over the 1988 daily average.

The department will continue, however, to provide a service to those eligible persons who wish to obtain United Kingdom passports and entry clearances and those for about 40 Commonwealth countries and dependent territories.

The department has been given an initial budget of \$804 million, a rise of 6.5 per cent.

Of the total, about \$63 million will be allocated for the screening of political refugees and assisting their resettlement or repatriation, an increase of 9.6 per cent on the revised estimate.

This is mainly due to the full-year provision for posts created in the current financial year and an increase in expenditure on the employment of additional temporary Vietnamese interpreters to assist with the screening of the boat people.

The computerisation of Taiwan visitors' permits and the enhancement of computer systems has resulted in an increase of 7.3 per cent in provisions for immigration control.

Expenses for the replacement of identity cards to eliminate illegal immigration continued to increase, but at a modest rate of 4.7 per cent.

The estimated total of \$146.6 million is mainly due to the continued development of a replacement computer for the identity card information system and the replacement of 18 cameras for the identity card issuing offices, although this is partly offset by the redeployment of 24 posts.

Fourteen additional posts will be created for the setting up of a new indexing unit to enhance the births, deaths and marriages records system, resulting in an increase of \$4.5 million.