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18 month delay for passport processing

By SIMON MACKLIN

THE Immigration Department has begun processing the 22,000 people who rushed to register for naturalisation in July but officials fear they will not be finished for about 18 months.

The department hopes to process up to 210 applicants each day and has deployed 158 staff to handle the applications compared with only 37 staff in the unit last year.

The formal processing began on Tuesday, but only 130 applicants arrived to attend the interviews.

But a spokesman said it was not possible to judge from the first day how many people would come forward for processing. Figures for the number who attended interviews yesterday were not available.

"We give them a date and a time to come and submit their formal application and give them about a month to prepare for the interview."

The applicants for naturalisation have to be nominated by two referees who must themselves be British Dependent Territory Citizens (BDTCs).

Those applying are also reminded that the fee varies between \$840 and \$1,200 depending on their existing status.

The applicants are required to supply birth certificates and other details for the interview.

The department has considered recruiting additional part-time staff to assist with the processing but at present the applications are being dealt with by existing staff.

But it is expected the processing would not be completed until the end of 1992.

In July, 22,000 people applied for naturalisation to avoid the cut-off date for applications for the British nationality package. The right of abode scheme will only be available to those who are British Dependent Territory Citizens.

Those who applied for dependent territory citizenship after the British Nationality (Hongkong) Bill received Royal assent at the end of July are not eligible for the scheme.