

700 dead letters each day

MORE than 700 letters a day are "sentenced to death" but a much larger number is saved on the verge of death, according to the General Post Office.

Incomplete, illegible or wrong addresses are major reasons letters, printed matter and small packages end in the dead letters office.

Controller of Post Chan Tung estimated 0.3 per cent of postal items in Hongkong were undeliverable but 90 per cent of those could be returned to the senders.

Among the 930 million items processed by the Post Office in the past fiscal year, only one in every 10,000 non-registered letters had to be pronounced dead because it could not be delivered or returned.

Mr Chan said undeliverable postal items were

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sent to a dead-letter office at the International Mail Centre in Hung Hom, where about five staff spent eight hours a day trying to trace addressees with the help of reference materials such as telephone directories, street maps and *Who's Who*.

If the addressees or senders still remained unknown, the postal items would be opened in a last resort to find out the senders' addresses.

If the senders' addresses still remained hidden the mail would be pronounced dead.

Depending on the contents, dead letter items are stored for between one week and five months in case of an inquiry or claim.

Last fiscal year, the Government received \$7,200 in cash and \$2,500 in cash coupons from dead letters.

In the same period, 1,270 magazines were sent to charity organisations and hospital waiting rooms.

Ten cheques found in dead letters were returned to the issuing bank, Mr Chan said.

He said small gifts were normally stored for three months before they were auctioned and the revenue credited to the Government Supplies Department.