

S. L. M. P.

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\$420m plan to ease stress in booming NT

The Urban Services Department will spend \$420 million in the New Territories over the next seven years as part of a plan to improve the region's recreation facilities.

The massive budget increase - which compares with \$19 million spent on recreation in the area since 1972 - will provide the New Territories with swimming pool complexes, public parks, stadiums and indoor games halls.

The deputy director of Urban Services (New Territories), Mr H. S. Grewal, said yesterday that landscape plans for the area had already been produced.

Mr Grewal was speaking at a meeting of the Lions Club of the New Territories.

He said the department is going through "a phase of rapid expansion and re-organisation" to meet the needs of the community.

This has included an increase in staff from 4,600 to 5,700 over the past two months, with a further 660 posts to be filled before the end of the financial year, representing a 25 per cent increase.

"You are all familiar with the stresses and strains associated with development of the New Territories," Mr Grewal said.

"I am concerned with the implications this has and whether the USD is geared up

properly to deal with the challenges that are being thrown in the wake of this development.

"The department is increasing its strength not only in terms of numbers alone, but also in terms of organisational structure."

Another concern of the department is to control the hawkker problem in the New Territories, Mr Grewal said.

"I do not to pretend to have any pat answers," he said.

The USD, he said, is setting up permanent markets and cooked food centres in an attempt to discourage hawkkers.

Two markets are under construction in the region. The first - in Shatin - will be finished by March next year.

The second, in Tsun Wan, will be ready by late next year.

In the next five years there should be 30 new markets and up to 20 new cooked food centres in the region, he said.

Five extra general duty teams will be formed to help control hawking. At present there is only one team operating in the region.

"The number of teams may have to be increased as development continues," Mr Grewal said.

"If the New Territories is to fulfil its role as ordered, well-planned and attractive communities, then on-street hawking and the resultant problems of noise, obstruction and litter cannot be allowed to take root."