

25pc increase in prosecution staff to handle arrests

By LINDY COURSE

THE prosecutions section of the Legal Department is to get a 25 per cent increase in staff to cope with an expected boom in arrests.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Peter Nguyen, told the *South China Morning Post* that 92 new posts had been created for his division from April 1.

Crimes on the increase included corruption, drug trafficking and sexual offences, Mr Nguyen said.

But the extra personnel were also needed because law enforcement agencies expect to be more effective, clamping down on counterfeiting credit cards, commercial fraud and bribery. This would result in more arrests and prosecutions.

And following the enactment of the Organised and Serious Crimes Ordinance, which gives police increased power of questioning and to compel production of documents, more prosecutions are expected. The crime of money laundering is also being extended, the director added.

There will be 12 new Crown Counsel, to add to the present 113 posts, 23

■ MR Nguyen hopes new streamlined procedures mean there will never be another Warwick Reid scandal.

"I hope to God it doesn't happen again. I can't guarantee it won't happen again. But there is closer monitoring of cases," he said.

"We avoid the situation of one person making a decision. There is widespread consultation between the counsel in charge of the case, the directorate-counsel in charge of that section, the deputy director, myself and the Attorney-General."

He said there was no rift between locals and expatriates in the department and morale was high, even among those expats whose contracts were not being renewed to make way for locals.

new prosecutors for magistracies throughout the territory and 57 extra back-up staff.

Mr Nguyen will use some of the new posts to bolster the division's Bill of Rights section, which comprises just two lawyers.

The addition of 23 lay prosecutors, to the existing 100, will mean less work being briefed out to private lawyers and thus a likely saving in expenditure.

This increase will not please the legal profession because this will take more work from them.

Some lawyers have argued that the prosecutions division should be wound down, leaving a pool of advisory lawyers, with most

cases being briefed out to the private sector.

But Mr Nguyen, who five months ago was in private practice himself, said he believed the balance was about right; with 2,681 prosecutions being handled by Crown Counsel, compared with 715 cases briefed out, in the first eight months of this year.

"For traditional reasons, we have always used barristers from the Bar. I think it's important that those in private practice should have experience of both defending and prosecuting, which will make them better all-rounders," he said.

The new support staff includes translators, clerks and secretaries.