

# \$525,000 a month lawyer sparks uproar

By Moira Holden

THE Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) said he would have "jumped" to investigate had he had known a former Legal Department member was getting paid more than half a million dollars a month by the government.

DPP Peter Nguyen came under fire from legislators yesterday when he confirmed junior barrister Graham Grant is receiving a monthly rate of \$525,000 to help prepare a case Mr Grant had initially worked on when he was a member of the department.

Since starting private practice in 1992, Mr Grant has been paid \$17.5 million for work on the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance Limited (BMFL) case

— the same case he had handled from 1985 while at the department.

The case involves charges relating to loans worth \$6 billion by BMFL to the Carrion group and has seen extraditions from England and France.

Mr Grant was given the job by Mr Nguyen's predecessor, John Wood.

The court case is still pending, but preparations are expected to be completed in March.

Members of the Legislative Council's Justice and Legal Services Panel severely criticised the amount of taxpayers' money paid to Mr Grant and asked why no one in the department could have car-

ried on the work after Mr Grant went into private practice.

Mr Nguyen told the panel he would have set up inquiries into the amount of money being paid to Mr Grant had he known and agreed with independent legislator Emily Lau: "I would also have thought \$525,000 a month was a lot of money," he said.

But he added: "He had been dealing with cases since 1985 and had an encyclopaedic knowledge of it — there was no one with comparable experience and ability in the department then to take over the case." The head of the commercial crime unit had approved the rates of pay and expenses at the time, he said.

Panel chairman Simon Ip criticised the department for its "very bad planning and very bad management".

Mr Nguyen told members Mr Grant had been asked to work on the case after he indicated he would be leaving the department and did not know what level of fees he would be paid until he took up the case in his private capacity.

But independent legislator Jimmy McGregor said it would be "odd" that Mr Grant would have had no prior discussion, even informally, about the level of fees.

Mr Grant had claimed expenses for up to 18 hours per day. Government officials claimed the checking pro-

cedure was "adequate". Legislators have now demanded a full list of Mr Grant's expenses.

In the last three years, three other cases have been given to private practitioners who had worked previously on the cases while members of the department.

A total of \$7.7m was spent on prosecution fees for the Sek Kong murder and two Vietnamese riot trials.

The department has introduced a delay of six months before offering any work to lawyers who leave the department.

The department will also seek level pegging of fees with the Legal Aid Department.

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