

## ~~Airport contractors told to take on locals first~~

By KEITH WALLIS

AIRPORT contractors who discriminate against local workers in favour of foreign staff could face severe penalties, Labour Commissioner Stephen Ip Shu-kwan said yesterday.

Firms could have applications to bring in foreign workers rejected, and this could lead to considerable difficulties for companies who would face both delays to their contracts and damages for every month they are behind schedule.

Contractors have to favour local workers under the labour importation scheme,

but construction unions claim local staff are being left jobless by contractors who prefer to recruit abroad.

"If contractors are being unreasonable and their job requirements too restrictive, then certainly this will affect their application. I think we have made clear if they are unreasonable then their applications might be rejected," Mr Ip said.

He has asked labour groups to provide details of any cases of discrimination, including those related to age and sex.

The importation scheme allows up to 27,000 skilled construction workers to be

recruited elsewhere, mainly from the mainland and Thailand, to work on airport-related projects.

But Mr Ip said the scheme could be overhauled depending on the reaction of unions and contractors.

"We will review the operation of the scheme from time to time. We are determined to help local workers."

Employment centres have details of 400 vacancies covering 26 trades for airport-related work.

There have been many inquiries since a special airport construction hotline was launched on Monday.