

S. K. M. P.

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Exco 'Yes' to closed camps

By DONALD CHEUNG

The closed-camp refugee policy will start soon following approval by the Executive Council yesterday, according to highly-placed sources.

Initially the Chimawan Detention Centre, which at one time housed more than 2,000 Vietnamese refugees formerly resettled in China, will become the first closed camp for new refugee arrivals and those who have violated camp rules.

Changes in the existing Immigration Ordinance governing Vietnamese refugees will also have to be made to empower the Government to detain newly-arrived refugees after landing.

It is expected that a Bill will be tabled in the Legislative Council on June 30 and a notification in the Government Gazette to put the new policy into effect will be published soon.

Yesterday's decision — a major departure from Hongkong's policy towards Vietnamese boatpeople — follows the Government's announcement earlier last month that it would carry out a study to decide whether refugees should be locked up with their right to work withdrawn.

The one-month study, which was completed last week, also looked at such items as where camps should be located and who should provide the staff and security.

Sources said several Government officials will today visit the Chimawan camp, which still has about 300 former China refugees due to be transferred to other centres.

As earlier hinted by the

Chief Secretary, Sir Philip Haddon-Cave, the new closed-camp in Lantau will be managed by the Correctional Services Department with other services provided by a voluntary agency.

It is expected that they will also have a look at Chimawan prison — manned by the Correctional Services Department — where several hundred adult prisoners are staying.

Sources said this prison had also been considered in the feasibility study.

Depending on the arrival figures in the summer months, sources said the Government would continue to look for other available sites, mainly in the northern part of the New Territories.

Official statistics show that 940 Vietnamese boatpeople have landed in Hongkong in the first five months of this year — about a 20 per cent drop over the corresponding period last year.

The idea of separating men from women, according to sources, is partly attributed

(Cont'd on Page 15, Col 1)

Closed camps get Exco green light

(Cont'd from Page 1)

ble to the inevitable baby boom in refugee camps over the past few years.

Several thousand refugee boys have been born in Hongkong since the boatpeople influx reached its peak in 1979.

This option drew strong opposition in refugee circles when it first came to light.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in particular, is understood to have been against this idea throughout its discussions with the Government because splitting families runs against the "basic international principles" under UHNCR's mandate.

"Throughout the negotiation and planning process, the UN organisation has insisted that the basic principles, including family unity, should not be compromised," one source close to the UNHCR said.

Sources stressed that details of the closed-camp plan have yet to be finalised as negotiations with the various authorities, including the UNHCR, continue.

One major contention is the financial cost that the closed camp policy will bring about, which the Government wants to keep down.

Sources said the Government is still putting final touches to estimates on running the closed camp, which might run to several million dollars.

It is understood the UNHCR is only willing to pay for food and basic facilities for the refugees in closed camps and it has yet to seek approval from the headquarters in Geneva.

One proposed idea to ease the Government's financial burden is to set up cottage industries in the closed camp.