

F. C. H. P.

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\$125,000 a day for us to feed refugees

By EILEEN WONG

The Government is spending about \$125,000 a day on food alone for the 24,884 Vietnamese refugees under its care.

This means \$45.6 million a year or 8.9 per cent of the estimated \$514 million 1979-80 budget for the Social Welfare Department.

The cost of two meals per day for each refugee plus an occasional orange or apple is

\$5, a Government spokesman said.

This does not take into account medical and other expenses involved in keeping them, to say nothing of the enormous manpower deployed to handle them from the day they reached local waters.

It is estimated that the number of refugees in Hongkong could top 75,000 by October if the present trend continues.

The influx has put a severe strain on the already limited manpower of various Government units involved in handling them, particularly of the Marine and Immigration Departments and the police.

A number of staff mem-

bers from these departments are understood to have cancelled their leave to help process and oversee the boat people.

The Prisons Department and the Civil Aid Services, responsible for running refugee detention centres and camps, are also hard-pressed in trying to cope.

Before the refugees are handed over to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, they are detained at various prisons and centres.

The Argyle Street military camp is the latest detention centre opened to accommodate 20,000 refugees.

Some 660 have already moved in since its opening on Monday.

To relieve various Government staff, one source yesterday said the Government is seeking the UNHCR's help in running the Argyle Street and Chimawan centres.

It now takes more than a month to put a Vietnamese refugee here under the UNHCR's care to be processed for overseas resettlement.

The source also pointed out that the UNHCR needs to speed up its work so that it can take more refugees from detention centres after they have completed necessary local immigration procedures.

A record 2,107 Viet

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Refugee food costs

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name boat people arrived last Thursday in 17 small junks while only 3,357 refugees have been resettled overseas so far this year.

The UNHCR now has 10,825 refugees in its care, most of whom are being accommodated at the Jubilee and the Shamshuipo transit centres.

With the apparent shortage of space, 12,157 refugees are still being temporarily put up at the Government Dockyard and the Western Quarantine Anchorage.

No one can tell when the two UNHCR transit camps in Shamshuipo can be returned to the Urban Services Department for redevelopment.

Many local residents are already complaining about the money and attention directed to the Vietnamese boat people.

Patrols wait for 'loaded' lighter

A naval patrol boat and two police launches were last night stationed off Lantau to prevent a lighter entering Hongkong waters with 330 Vietnamese refugees.

The lighter was towed out to sea yesterday by the Macau authorities after provisions were given to the refugees.

It was later spotted by a helicopter steaming towards Hongkong.

A naval patrol boat and two police launches were immediately despatched to Fan Lau off Lantau to prevent the lighter sneaking into port.

Reports from Macau say that four Vietnamese boats with another 204 refugees on board arrived in the territory yesterday.

They were intercepted off Taipa Island by marine police and prevented from entering the harbour.