

# 340 firms join the chamber 'battle'

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST  
11 JUN 1991

By BELLETTE LEE

A FLOOD of 340 companies last week applied to join the General Chamber of Commerce in an apparent effort to tilt the balance of power in its indirect elections to the Legislative Council.

The record for applications was reached during the height of the chamber's internal dispute over accusations of "vote-stuffing" for the September 12 poll.

A chamber source yesterday suggested that the firms had been mobilised by Mr Jimmy McGregor's supporters, including Mr Ian Tomlin and Mr Simon Murray.

But whether these companies will be able to vote in the functional constituency elections, will depend on whether they can beat the Government's July 1 deadline for voter registration.

The applications will be referred to the chamber's 20-member general committee for approval after they are screened by the secretariat.

The firms will first have to be admitted by the chamber before they can register as the chamber's voters.

The next meeting of the general committee is scheduled for June 24.

The chamber's director, Mr Ian Christie, yesterday said there was no rule governing the time limit for an application to be vetted.

"We do everything we can to ensure that all these applications can be processed before June 24," he said, describing last week's tally as "astonishing".

Applicants, Mr Christie said, had to satisfy membership requirements that they were active companies and were financially viable.

A source suggested that last week's 340 applicants, each of whom will have to

pay an annual fee of \$2,100, were all supporters of Mr McGregor.

At present, the chamber has 2,919 members.

Mr McGregor last night admitted his supporters had initiated the recruitment exercise two weeks ago to "level the playing field".

But he said he had no idea about the exact number of applications that his supporters had filed, adding that it might be possible that some of the 340 companies came from his rival, Mr Paul Cheng Ming-sun's side.

"A number of supporters asked me whether they should register their subsidiary companies. I said no. But they said isn't that the rule to be played?"

"I have tried to change the rule. But no one can do anything about it - neither the Government nor the chamber. I am just playing by the rules of the game. It's they [Mr Cheng and his supporters] who started the game in August last year, not me," Mr McGregor said.

He said he had asked the Government for the last time three weeks ago whether it was willing to modify the rules to require companies to have at least two years' membership in the chamber before they could vote in the Legco election.

But the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Mr Michael Suen Ming-yeung, told him the move would not be made until after September.

It is understood that some of the 340 companies come from the Hutchison Whampoa group, of which Mr Murray is managing director and tycoon Mr Li Kashing chairman.

But Mr McGregor stressed that neither Mr Li nor Cheung Kong was involved in his campaign.