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Businessman out to make a name for the Man clan

By JOHN TANG

INDIGENOUS New Territories resident Mr Man For-tai is determined to revive the name of his family, one of the oldest clans in the area, by working his way to Hongkong's top law-making body, the Legislative Council.

The 51-year-old businessman is ready for another battle with his former rival, solicitor Mr Tai Chin-wah, in the New Territories West constituency in the upcoming Legislative Council elections.

Mr Man, rural committee chairman of San Tin, Yuen Long, lost by a mere four votes in the 1985 polls to Mr Tai, who was backed by the influential Tai family in Shep Pat Heung.

The Man family moved to Yuen Long several hundred years ago, but few of its members were as influential as other strong clans, such as the Tangs and the Pangs, in rural affairs.

If Mr Man succeeds this time, he will be the only member of his clan to sit so close to power in recent memory.

Born in San Tin, Mr Man went to Britain in 1958 at the age of 21 to study construction management while working part-time in a Chinese restaurant.

From Britain, he built up a business network in Europe, the United States and Canada, then Hongkong and China. Now he heads more than 15 companies with businesses ranging from tourism



Man For-tai

to property development. Mr Man returned to San Tin in 1977 to find that thousands of his kinsmen had emigrated, leaving hectares of farmland unattended.

The scene prompted him to draft a development plan for the area and he persuaded Government planners and other developers to help.

"It is the most remote part of the territory but it is also very close to the developing Shenzhen special economic zone. It is the best place to put together Hongkong's technology and

China's cheap labour," said Mr Man.

"Instead of looking into ways to improve the transport network to allow more people to commute to the urban areas, we should be creating more job opportunities in the New Territories."

Although Mr Man worked on his ambitious San Tin development plan for five years, his dream has never got off the ground.

But he said he was not disappointed. "I have no regrets. I know it takes time. In fact I believe it is only a matter of time.

"I will not abandon my hope until I won't be able to handle it any more."

Mr Man was happy that at least his efforts had won him the respect of the villagers and the chairmanship of San Tin Rural Committee.

As chairman he sits on the Yuen Long District Board and thus is eligible to stand for election in the constituency.

As an overseas Chinese, Mr Man said the Government should attract overseas Chinese to return to Hongkong to ease the brain drain problem and ensure a smooth progress in the localisation of the civil service.

"I am not saying that the five million people here cannot administer themselves after 1997, although I agree that more than 100 years of colonial rule has created some limitation.

"But I believe that people with overseas exposure will be an asset in helping to develop Hongkong."