

100,000 grab forms for SAR passport on first day

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More than 100,000 people yesterday snapped up application forms for the new SAR passport - the first day they became available.

Despite warnings that there would be no first-come-first-served issuing of the new documents, queues

formed at the Wan Chai Immigration Department headquarters and outside its nine branches offices well before their doors opened at 8.30 am.

By 11 am more than 40,000 had collected application forms.

And when the offices closed at 5.30 pm, 91,000

forms had been handed out. This figure does not take into account forms collected at scores of district offices and main post offices, but officials think a total of well over 100,000 were issued.

Immigration officer Felix Tsui Kwong-yiu said: "It is a little more than we expected, but we were well within our

limit, having made 350,000 forms available just for today.

"I think a lot of people heeded our advice that if they had a British National (Overseas) passport or a Certificate of Identity, there was no need to rush."

Immigration bosses expect a similar turnout today

and have allocated more than 200 staff to process the expected final figure of five million applications.

The new Special Administrative Region passports will be valid from July 1, but the first batch will only be distributed on July 3 as the previous two days are public holidays.

So far 17 countries, including Britain, Canada and Singapore, have announced that they will allow visa-free entry to SAR passport-holders.

And the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said that 10 more countries have also granted holders visa-free access.

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