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# '80 tipped to seek council seats

By **Tonny Chan, Jessie Yim and Kathy Chan**

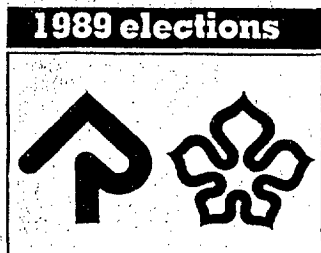
MORE than 80 people are expected to run in the municipal elections in March.

While liberals are expected to have the upper hand in the district-based direct election seats, conservative forces are tipped to win most of the 10 indirectly elected Urban Council seats through the urban district boards.

Some 60 aspirants are expected to join the district-based direct elections and 24 others to contest the election through the district boards.

A total of 27 directly elected seats for Hongkong's two municipal councils are up for grabs in the March 9 elections — 12 for the Regional Council and 15 for the Urban Council. In addition, 10 Urbco seats have been set aside for district board representatives.

Liberals will compete strongly in the directly elected seats in both the urban areas and in the New Territories, but conservative kaifong elements, some of



them supported by local left-wing groups, are likely to sweep most of the indirectly elected seats through district boards.

Liberal groups have tried to avoid clashing head-on in the same constituencies, but battles are expected among liberals in some districts such as Wong Tai Sin and Sha Tin.

Conservative groups say they will adopt a low-key approach to their campaign work.

Unofficial estimates put the number of candidates from the liberal camp at more than 30, two-thirds of them from three major groups: Meeting Point, Hongkong Affairs Society and

## INSIDE

■ Poll fund for first-timers; Dry run for Legco; Bid for higher turn-out

Page 2 ►

the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood.

While Meeting Point will send its members to different New Territories constituencies, Hongkong Affairs Society will try to consolidate its force in the urban areas.

Members of the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood will compete in three New Territories seats and two urban districts.

The two oldest political groups in Hongkong, the Reform Club and the Civic Association, will each field four members.

The Progressive Hongkong Society, backed by Executive

Councillor Miss Maria Tam will field at least four members.

Eight people who are said to be supported by left-wing groups are expected to stand in districts like Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Tai Po and Tuen Mun.

Three incumbent Urban Councillors, Mr Lee Chik-yuet, Mrs Chow Cheong Wai-ping and Mr Kwan Lim-ho and three Regional Councillors, Mr Lee Wing-tat, Mr Tang Kam-fat and Tang Kwok-yung, have decided not to run again.

The past couple of months also saw potential candidates rallying support from strong local grassroots groups and friendly organisations.

Although the debate over the Basic Law draft apparently delayed some liberals' election preparations, a number of them gained publicity by participating in the 500-hour fast against Mr Louis Cha's mainstream proposal for the post-1997 political system.