

Apathy leads to review of poll methods

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ELECTION methods are to be reviewed by a new Government working group after voter apathy saw the turnout rate in the municipal elections dive to a record low.

The review committee will be one of the first major tasks undertaken by Mr Michael Suen Ming-yeung who became Constitutional Affairs Secretary just before the election.

The inter-departmental group, to be chaired by Mr Suen, will examine the low voter turnout and its implications on future elections. It will also look into ways of improving the electoral procedures.

A report will be compiled within the next few months and is likely to include suggestions to boost the level of public involvement in three major elections which are scheduled in three years.

Elections for the district boards, the municipal councils, and the Legislative Council will be held within a 12-month period starting in 1991.

Race still on for Urbco position

FOR Urban District Board members the race for an Urban Council seat is not over yet.

At least 13 of them have registered their bids to sit on the municipal body through indirect election route.

By the end of this month, 10 representatives from urban districts will be indirectly elected to join the 15 newly-elected and 15 appointed members in the Urban Council.

So far, none of the district board members - including Mr Gary Ahuja and Mr Wong Yuen-wei, who were defeated in the territory-wide election two days ago - have turned up to stand for the second challenge.

But elected members Mr Wong Hon-ching of Wan Chai and Mr Kan Chi-ho and Mr Yeung Chiu-ming of Wong Tai Sin have forsaken the chance to make a final bid. The nomination in the two districts expired yesterday.

Mr Albert Li Sze-bay and Mr Fung Kwong-chung are contesting to represent Wong Tai Sin in the Urban Council. Mr Ip Kwok-chung

Reports by ANDY HO, JOHN TANG, KENNETH KO, DAPHNE CHENG and ESME LAU

Officials want to avoid a repetition of Thursday's election turnout which was also the third in a series of three elections held in the past 12 months.

Only 17.6 per cent of 1.2 million voters cast ballots, which represented a 10 per cent drop from the 27 per cent turnout rate in the last polls in 1986.

It set a new post-war low in turnout for municipal council elections and surpassed the record set in 1981 when only 18 per cent of electors exercised their voting right.

Mr Suen yesterday said: "We've got to find ways of encouraging the voters to come out and exercise their political right."

He said: "The report of this review will be considered in conjunction with those of the reviews carried out after the 1988 district board elections and the 1988 Legco elections.

"Any improvement measures considered necessary

will be implemented for the next cycle of elections starting in 1991."

Mr Suen appealed to the public to send their suggestions to the Registration and Electoral Division of the Constitutional Affairs Branch.

He said the low turnout was not due to lack of Government publicity or calibre of the candidates.

Although he conceded that the poor turnout was a result of a lack of interest, Mr Suen declined to speculate why.

"In so far as the Government is concerned, I think it is important that we make proper preparation for the election," he said. "We organise the election and we make sure that people are aware that an election is taking place."

"But a lot of other things depend on the voters themselves. Above all, people who are eligible to vote ought to put themselves in a state of mind that they had to participate in the election because the rate depends very much on their participation."

But leaders of the liberal lobbies yesterday said the bleak political future of Hongkong was the major cause of a loss of interest on the part of the public.

Vice-chairman of Meeting Point Mr Fred Li Wah-ming said: "I was at some polling stations last (Thursday) night and I strongly felt that people regarded the elections as a useless exercise."

"A lack of publicity is one thing. Having too many elections in a year is another. But the major reason is that people have doubts on the recent development of the Basic Law consultation."

Meanwhile, the \$3,000 election deposits of three candidates were forfeited because they had received less than 12.5 per cent of the votes cast in Thursday's elections.

They were Mr Cheng Mui-tin of Yuen Long, Mr Tong Lock of Sha Tin East, and Miss Wong Ching of Shau Kei Wan.

So far the Independent Commission Against Corruption has received 13 complaints to pursue, which included false claims and bribery. The Registration and Electoral Division has also received three complaints.

and Mr John Wu Man-keung are candidates in Yau Tsim. Mr Wong Siu-ye and Ms Fong Pui-sheung also declared candidacy in Kowloon City.

Mr Hau Shui-pul is competing with Mr Pang Kam-fai to represent Kwun Tong. Appointed member Mr Albert Poon Chun-kwok is challenged by Mr Tenny Hung in Southern District. In Wan Chai, Mr Kenneth Lee Yiu-kwong faces a challenge from Mr Cham Yau-tong.

In Eastern District, only appointed member Ms Christina Ting Yuk-chee had declared her interest in the race, but other members are expected to before the expiry of nominations next Wednesday.

Mongkok, Shamshuipo, and Central and Western districts have yet to come up with their candidates before the deadline later next week.

But elected members Alexander Chang Yau-hung and Chan Tak-chor are said to be interested in representing Central and Western District in the municipal body.