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The political scramble starts

1,000 seek election in DB battle

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It's being billed as the biggest variety show in Hongkong's history — political history, that is, with more than 1,000 candidates preparing to battle it out in earliest in three months' time.

Government officials expect almost all groups who have exhibited any political tendencies in recent times to field candidates in Hongkong's first territory-wide district board elections in March.

There are 237 seats in 145 constituencies at stake. Officials expect there will be at least three to six candidates competing for each seat in most areas. This contrasts with the



Politics of change

previous two district board elections when a total of three candidates romped unopposed into seats.

Members of old and newly formed political groups, of pro-Peking and pro-Taiwan unions, have expressed interest in standing in the elections.

They will be up against established district-level organisations such as mutual aid committees, owners, corporations, area committees, kaifong associations and rural committees in the New Territories.

Adding to the contest list are several Legislative Coun-

cil/district board members, most incumbent elected district board members as well as some of their appointed counterparts.

Even a Chinese University student has indicated he is going to stand.

Never in Hongkong's history has there been such an enthusiastic response from so many interest groups and individuals.

Government officials are heartened by the response, seeing it as a positive sign to the development of a more representative administration.

A number of officials have described it as the "blossom of 100 flowers" and they expect more than 1,000 candidates to register when the nomination period starts tomorrow week.

Although many would-be candidates deny the increasing political opportunities have anything to do with their decision to stand in the elections, some have privately admitted the district board could be their first foothold on the political ladder.

Many pressure group leaders have chosen to stay in the background and send their representatives to test the system.

A large number of candidates from pressure groups will be running as individuals and not representing their groups.

This is widely seen as them taking a cautious approach — taking part in the elections but not fully committing themselves.

One obvious reason for this is that many groups have not adequately prepared themselves for the big exercise.

Some representatives regard the March elections as

Candidates ready for battle

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their "first line of attack" and the real battle will start at 1986 Regional Council and Urban Council elections and possible direct elections to the Legislative Council in the future.

Already, many would-be candidates are busy planning their strategy.

An interesting development is the forming of an embryonic form of political alliance among candidates.

Eleven would-be candidates have joined to contest seats in different constituencies for the Central and Western District Board.

The candidates include a businessman, an academic, an architect, an accountant, a lawyer and kaifong members.

Some are also members of the Hongkong Affairs Society, Hongkong People's Association, Meeting Point and New Hongkong Researchers.

However, some political groups, which lack grassroots support, decided to stay as

"opinion groups" for the time being, until "the time is ripe."

Local groups with good grassroots links like the area committees and mutual aid committees are expected to continue to gain the upper hand in the coming elections in the urban areas.

Keen competition among rival groups is expected in Kun Tong, Shamshuipo and Eastern districts.

In the New Territories, rural traditional forces are expected to dominate but recent migrants to the new towns are fast becoming a force to be reckoned with.

The elections have also prompted many would-be candidates from pressure groups and social workers to come together and exchange views on campaign strategy.

Many interested people have apparently jumped the gun and started campaigns and lobbying before the actual nomination period for candidates begins next week.

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