

3 Nov. 1990

\$200m price for computer vote counting

By FANNY WONG

THE Government is exploring the possibility of installing a \$200 million computer system to count the votes in next year's three-tier elections.

The Deputy Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Mr Darwin Chen, said yesterday that computerisation was technically feasible but expensive.

Mr Chen said enormous human resources were required for polling and counting duties at each election.

Up to 5,000 staff would be deployed from within the civil service on election day to man polling stations and count votes in the 1991 elections, Mr Chen said.

"Taking into consideration the increase in the size of the electorate and the frequency of elections, the Government is assessing whether it is better to continue to rely on manual practices or to computerise polling and vote counting," he said.

A fully computerised system would cost about \$200 million, but as elections are conducted once every four years, the equipment might lie idle for most of the time.

"It is necessary to weigh carefully whether such an investment is value for money," Mr Chen said.

"Further examination is therefore required, especially to explore the feasibility of sharing such a

system with other Government users."

Mr Chen said the Government was organising a comprehensive package of publicity to encourage people to vote.

A total of 484,761 people signed up as voters during a 10-week voter registration drive which ended on Wednesday.

The exercise boosted the number of registered voters to 2.08 million, or 56 per cent of Hongkong's 3.7 million eligible voters.

Before the campaign started in mid-August, only 1.6 million people, or less than 44 per cent, had registered.

Mr Chen said nomination of candidates for the district board elections on March 3 would begin on January 7.

He said an interesting feature of the last district board elections was that among the 420,000 people who turned up to vote, 1,028 were blind or handicapped.

A total of 97,000, or 23 per cent, of the total number of voters were locals aged over 55.