

35 rush to fight first direct poll

HONGKONG'S inaugural direct elections to the Legislative Council attracted 35 contenders for the nine double-seat constituencies on the first day of the two-week nomination period yesterday.

Another 13 have signed up for the 21 functional constituency openings, bringing the pool of candidates to 48.

The Principle Executive Officer for Electoral Services, Mr Wan Yiu-sing, described the response as enthusiastic and said it boded well for the September polls.

He said the first-day tally was "spectacular and encouraging", adding that his office had not received any complaints of irregularities.

The Registration and Electoral Office, however, is looking into a discrepancy in the latest electoral roll and its earlier editions.

The nomination of Mr Lai King-tim for Kowloon East has been held up because his name was missing

A total of 48 aspirants signed up for September's Legislative Council elections on the first day of the official nomination period yesterday. Reports by ANDY HO, SHIRLEY YAM, DOREEN CHEUNG, BELLETTE LEE, DOROTHY LAI and ESTHER CHAN.

from the latest electoral roll, even though he was listed for the district board polls in March.

Male politicians continued to dominate the electoral arena, with only four women lodging their nominations yesterday.

They were Miss Emily Lau Wai-hing, Miss Jennifer Chow Kit-bing, Miss Chan Yuen-han and Mrs Elsie Tu.

At 78, Mrs Tu was the oldest nominee and lawyer Mr James To Kun-sun, 28, the youngest.

Three of the nine sitting councillors seeking re-election are contesting the direct polls. They are Mr Chan Ying-lun, Mr Szeto Wah and Mr Andrew Wong Wang-fat.

Up to 40 per cent of the 35 nominees for the direct elections are teachers, lecturers or headmasters.

They are followed by lawyers and social workers.

New Territories East, comprising Sha Tin and Sai Kung, emerged as the most competitive district, with seven nominations.

However, 12 of the functional seats, including the four designated for the commercial and industrial sectors, have yet to receive any nominations.

Nominations in Island East were delayed for more than half-an-hour because of an argument over whether candidates should be allowed to be photographed with the Returning Officer.

The incident erupted when Island East Returning Officer, Mr Peter Mann, refused to be pictured while receiving Mr Cheng Kai-nam's papers.

Mr Mann said he was working on advice from the City and New Territories Administration (CNTA).

It is understood that officials were also instructed not to attend campaign functions of individual candidates to avoid giving the impression that the Government favoured certain hopefuls.

Mr Cheng and two other nominees, Mr Chan Ying-lung and Miss Jennifer Chow Kit-bing, questioned the need for such a precaution.

A CNTA information officer was yesterday sent to the district office to explain the policy.

The dispute was settled after Mr Mann agreed to be photographed with all three.