

71 enter fray as election battle hots up

AT the halfway mark of the nomination period for the Legislative Council elections most candidates have thrown their hats in the ring.

Five more applications were received yesterday, bringing the nominations so far to 71.

The 18 directly elected seats will so far be contested by 45 nominees, 35 of whom staked their claim last Monday, the first day of nominations.

At least seven more candidates are expected to register for the direct elections before nominations close on Monday.

A further 11 candidates are expected to stand in the various functional constituencies.

A heated battle among at least seven candidates will take place in New Territories East, the constituency with the highest number of candidates.

The constituency, composing Sha Tin and Sai Kung, is attractive to Legislative Council aspirants with its mixed composition of rural and urban dwellers, and apparent lack of major consolidated power.



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The battle for New Territories West is taking longer to heat up with only three runners so far.

Turmoil within the liberal camp, widely tipped to do well, came to the fore last week.

United Democrats central committee member Ronald Chow Mei-tak caught fellow members by surprise by announcing his candidacy for New Territories North.

Securing support from the Shamshuipo-based Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, Mr Chow broke with the UDHK, abandoning his party membership.

The incident also worsened relations between the association, the

UDHK and the other leading liberal group Meeting Point, as all have fielded a candidate to run in the constituency.

A total of 26 nominations have been received so far for the 21 functional constituency seats.

On Sunday, businessmen's Legislative Council representative Ho Sai-chu hinted that he would not seek re-election, citing a low chance of success.

His previous backers, leaders of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, have shifted their allegiance to the chamber's vice-chairman Dr Philip Wong Yu-hong.

Dr Wong, earlier tainted by controversy over preferential share arrangements, won the blessing of the Chinese authorities to sit as the functional constituency's candidate. His nomination was forwarded last Friday.

Mr Ho's intended withdrawal is expected to leave fellow legislator Ronald Arculli with a free run in the newly established Real Estate and Construction constituency.