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5,000 press for democracy in future system

By CHRIS YEUNG

MORE than 5,000 people called for greater democracy in the Basic Law through songs and slogans at a rally in Victoria Park yesterday.

The event, orchestrated by a 147-group democratic alliance, marked the climax of a territory-wide campaign for a greater element of direct elections in the Basic Law, whose first round of consultation ends in 12 days.

Declaring that democracy was an irresistible world trend, speakers maintained that only a democratic political system could stop the so-called brain-drain, protect the rights and freedoms of people and ensure that the untried policy of "one country, two systems" be fully implemented in Hongkong for 50 years after 1997.

As a genuine and meaningful beginning of developing democracy in 1997, the rally demanded that the chief executive be elected by universal suffrage with nominees approved by one-tenth of the legislature, and that at least one-quarter of the legislators should be directly elected.

They condemned the grand electoral college system as championed by the



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Group of 88 business and professional lobby as a colonial and feudalistic system aimed at protecting the rich.

A spokesman for the Joint Committee on the Promotion of a Democratic Government, Mr Yeung Sum, said they would press their demands with Beijing officials on September 26.

Mr Yeung said the group, led by Mr Szeto Wah, a veteran democracy advocate, had asked for a dialogue on the Basic Law with Vice-Premier Wu Xueqian, and Mr Ji Pengfei, director of the Hongkong and Macau Affairs Office under the State Council.

Mr Szeto, starting the 2½-hour rally, said: "Today, September 18 is a memorial day of national humiliation when China lost its northeastern territory to Japan half a century ago. It's incredible that we're now gathering to fight for a territory that will be returned to the motherland in nine years.

"The most important thing for the resumption of sovereignty is to hand back the ruling power to the peo-

ple but not to foreigners. That's democracy," said Mr Szeto, who is also a Basic Law drafter.

"What's the point of going back under Chinese sovereignty if we don't even have the right to elect our representatives?"

Another guest speaker, Baptist College economics lecturer, Dr Tang Shu-hung, said it was an insult to the wisdom of Hongkong people to say they were not ready for a "one man, one vote" system.

Dr Tang, criticising the grand electoral college system as undemocratic, said: "Businessmen believe in competition. They should not be afraid of fair competition in politics."

Other speakers included Basic Law drafter Martin Lee Chu-ming; the director of the newly-formed Hongkong Christian Institute, the Reverend Kwok Nai-wang; Catholic leader, Father Louis Ha Keloon; social services worker, Mr Hui Yin-fat; unionists, Mr Wong Wai-hung and Mr Lau Chin-shek; lawyer, Mr Albert Ho Chun-yan; medical specialist, Dr Huang Chen-ya; student leader, Mr Cheung Yin-tang; Urban Councillor Fung Kin-kee; and women's groups' leader, Ms Rose Wu.