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Hong Kong:

More than 400,000 vote in Occupy Central's electoral reform poll

- News from around the world -

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Voting began in online poll on reform plans for 2017 chief executive election at noon on Friday; voting system subject of one of the largest cyberattacks in history, experts say.

More than 400,000 people have voted in Occupy Central's online poll on options for the 2017 chief executive election since it launched at noon on Friday, despite the online voting system coming under one of the largest cyberattacks in history according to experts.

By 7am on Saturday morning, 437,332 people had cast their votes via the system, Occupy Central organisers said. The figure hit 100,000 shortly after 2pm.

Hong Kong permanent residents can pick one out of three shortlisted proposals on how to elect the next chief executive in 2017 via the smartphone app "PopVote" or by visiting the website popvote.hk until June 29.

They can also express their preference for whether Legco should veto any reform plan that does not provide a genuine choice of candidates to the public in 2017.

Professor Benny Tai Yiu-ting, one of the founders of the pro-democracy Occupy Central movement, said he was confident that the electronic platform built by the University of Hong Kong's public opinion programme would be able to handle the numbers voting.

But the platform has been inundated by an almost unprecedented number of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks since its pre-registration launch last week, culminating in a sharp peak in attacks on Friday.

Organisers have already extended the voting period from three days to ten.

Matthew Prince, the chief executive of CloudFlare, the website maintenance company that is providing technical support to the popvote.hk site, has described the extent of the cyberattacks on Twitter.

"Your vote [in the poll] could ... send a clear signal to the government that you call for genuine universal suffrage, not a counterfeit."

Professor Benny Tai Yiu-ting

Earlier on Friday morning, Benny Tai said: "I know there are many people who oppose Occupy Central [who] do support genuine universal suffrage."

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People unable to vote online will be able to visit one of the 15 actual polling stations set up throughout the city on June 22, with another 10 stations open on June 29. A further opportunity to vote would be available to those wanting to vote.

Tai hit back during his interview at the government source that had described recent violent protests at Legco against the northeastern New Territories development plan as a trial run for Occupy Central.

Occupy Central had clearly set out its campaign's objectives, he said, and had stressed its peaceful attitude to protest, whilst those in the anti-development group had not.

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"It is very important to draw a line in mass movement," he said, adding that a picket team had also been formed to ensure Occupy Central's civil disobedience movement could be run peacefully.

"I believe Occupy Central would not be 'hijacked' by some of the radical forces," he said.

A government spokesman said the "so-called civil referendum" had no legal effect as it did not exist in the Basic Law or local laws.

"The HKSAR Government has repeatedly stated that proposals on political development should be, legally, strictly in accordance with the Basic Law and relevant Interpretation and Decisions of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress," the spokesman said.

On public nomination, an element included in all the three proposals, the spokesman said the power to nominate chief executive candidates is vested in the nominating committee only under the Basic Law.

He also said this element was highly controversial in legal, political and operational aspects so the government believed it was unlikely to be adopted.

"There are many opinions in the community, including those from legal professional groups and individuals, that 'civic nomination' will bypass or undermine the substantive powers of the [nominating committee] to nominate candidates and hence is, legally, highly controversial."

"Politically, such a proposal will unlikely be conducive to forging consensus, and operationally, the feasibility of implementation is questionable," he said.