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\$300,000 limit set on poll campaigns

By SHIRLEY YAM

CANDIDATES for the territory's first direct elections to the Legislative Council next year will be allowed to spend up to \$300,000 on electioneering.

The Chief Secretary, Sir David Ford, told the Executive and Legislative Councillors at their in-house meeting yesterday that the Government wanted to set the spending limit at \$150,000 to \$300,000.

A final decision on the exact ceiling will be made before September.

The campaign fee limit for candidates for the indirect elections of the 21 functional constituencies is expected to be raised from \$36,000 to between \$50,000 and \$70,000.

Candidates for the direct polls will be given a higher campaign expense ceiling because of the considerably larger voter populations.

The expense limit for candidates for the 19 district boards and the two municipal councils elections will also be raised.

Candidates for the Urban and Regional Councils

are allowed to spend only \$43,000 at present in their campaign.

Proposals to amend the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Ordinance will soon be submitted to the Executive Council for endorsement.

Some councillors said the \$300,000 ceiling for the direct polls was reasonable because the number of voters ranged from as many as 100,000 in New Territories North to 250,000 in central Kowloon.

Meanwhile, legislators yesterday rejected at their in-house meeting a proposal to repeal the Government's power to ban political propaganda in schools.

Schoolmaster Mr David Cheung Chi-kong said: "We feel that at a time when social stability is of utmost importance, removal of such power will bring anxiety. The Government needs to keep the power as a safeguard."

Instead, members suggested amending the existing law to allow the Government to regulate propaganda activities containing unbalanced or derogative political messages in schools.

The councillors, however, agreed to lift the present

ban on political activities in schools to pave the way for civic education and greater civic rights.

"This means candidates in the coming elections will be allowed to put up their posters or to talk about their platform in schools as long as everyone is given an equal chance," Mr Cheung said.

The current Education Ordinance stipulates: "The Governor-in-Council may make regulations providing for the prohibition of political, subversive or tendentious activities or propaganda in schools and amongst teachers and pupils."

The Government had proposed repealing this clause and replacing it with a set of guidelines by the Education Department.

At yesterday's meeting, councillors also decided to defer to approve a fund allocation for the kindergarten fee remission scheme which they said was unsatisfactory as it would benefit only a few families.

Members will discuss with Government officials on June 8 the provision, which was initially scheduled to be endorsed by the Finance Committee next Friday.