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\$200,000 limit for Legco candidates

By FANNY WONG

CANDIDATES for next year's elections will be allowed to spend between \$30,000 and \$200,000 on canvassing, depending on the type of office they contest.

Aspirants for the territory's maiden direct elections to the Legislative Council, expected to be held on September 15, will be able to use a maximum of \$200,000 on electioneering.

Those vying for the 21 Legco functional constituency seats, however, will have to observe a \$50,000 ceiling. The figure represents a 40 per cent increase on 1988 levels.

The limits are included in an election package to be submitted to the Ex-

ecutive Council for approval on Tuesday.

The Government's proposal to raise the limits for election campaigns is the result of efforts to increase voter turnout.

The various elections, except those for the Legco functional constituencies, are proposed to be held on Sundays as another step to encourage voters to exercise their civil rights.

The first direct elections for 18 Legco seats are to be held on a Sunday in about mid-September in 1990, most probably on September 15.

Contestants for the Urban and Regional Councils are entitled to spend up to \$70,000, representing a 63 per

cent increase on the ceiling for the previous elections.

District board candidates, on the other hand, can use \$30,000, or 50 per cent higher than the 1988 limits.

In proposing the ceilings, officials have taken into account the sizes of the electorate of the direct polls.

To allay worries that the system will favour the rich, the Government suggests that both political groups and individual independent candidates be allowed to raise funds publicly to help finance their campaigns.

A ceiling, however, will be imposed on such donations.

It is understood the maximum a

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group can solicit would be equivalent to the combined amount its candidates would be allowed to spend for the various categories of elections.

A group fielding 10 candidates for the Legco direct elections, for instance, would be entitled to raise as much as \$2 million.

The same rule applies to independent candidates, who will be allowed to receive donations for as much as they are allowed to spend on electioneering. To ensure

fairness, those seeking re-election will also be free to raise funds.

Efforts to encourage a high voter turnout, including large-scale publicity campaigns, will be launched for the three elections.

The Government does not favour a proposal by some political groups that part of the electioneering costs should be reimbursed for candidates who manage to secure a certain percentage of the total votes cast.

The administration believes such an arrangement

is not provided for in British elections, though it is practised in some countries.

It is argued that hidden subsidies, such as free postage, are already on offer.

All candidates will be allowed two free postages and election material sent out through facsimile machines will not be counted as election expenses.

In addition the Government does not favour imposing a "cut-off" date for the calculation of election campaign fees, nor will it limit the number of posters,

banners and signboards to be put up by contestants.

Pamphlets will be published to explain how electioneering expenses should be handled to avoid corrupt and illegal practices.

Liberal activists earlier asked the Government to declare all polling days as public holidays to attract a bigger turnout.

However, the Government is convinced that it will be more effective to hold the polls on Sundays.

Separate dates for the Legco direct and functional

constituency elections are proposed as another way to increase voter turnout.

It is understood the election day for the functional constituency elections is likely to be held a few days before the direct polls.

Meanwhile, the Government yesterday gazetted six bills to pave the way for the elections.

Under the Corrupt and Illegal Practices (Amendment) Bill 1990, fraudulent voting by giving a false address will be made an offence.