

28 July 1990

2 free mailings for Legco contestants

By S Y Yue

CANDIDATES standing for direct elections to the Legislative Council next year will be allowed two free campaign mailings to their constituents.

The Government is subsidising each candidate with \$300,000 worth of postal service.

The Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Michael Suen, said the amount was calculated on the assumption that there were 25,000 voters in each constituency.

Based on the further assumption that two contestants will be contesting each of the 18 constituencies, the Government will be spending more than \$10.8 million next year in mailing alone.

This is on top of the \$4 million to be spent on facilities such as polling stations.

Previously, the Government provided only one free mailing.

The plan was approved by the Executive Council yesterday.

Under the plan, the limit on personal election expenses by candidates for next year's Legco polls is set at \$200,000.

Mr Suen said the Government had taken into account every kind of candidate in arriving at the \$200,000 limit.

"The limit is not set too high to prevent candidates with ample financial resources from having an unfair advantage over other candidates," he said.

"The limit is not set too low to avoid imposing restrictions on electioneering activities."

The limit will be a flat rate for large and small constituencies.

Meanwhile, the limit for Legco functional constituencies has been

1991 elections and expenses

Type	Expense ceilings	Dates
Legco Direct	\$260,000	15/9/91
Functional Constituencies	\$50,000	12/9/91
Municipal	\$70,000	5/5/91
District Boards	\$30,000	3/3/91

raised by \$14,000 to \$50,000.

The limit for district boards is \$30,000 and that for municipal councils is \$70,000.

The new limit for the election of district board representatives to municipal councils is \$6,000.

Mr Suen said any publicity activity by political parties on elections would be counted as part of election expenses.

"They would be apportioned among the candidates of the political parties," Mr Suen said.

He said the Government did not consider it necessary to step up the monitoring of spending by candidates.

"They have to report their expenses to the Government," he said.

The principal assistant secretary for constitutional affairs, Francis Ho, said candidates who lied about their expenses would be committing an offence.

In order to encourage more people to vote, the Government has decided the three-tier direct elections will be held on Sundays.

Since the introduction of direct elections in 1982, the turnout rate has never exceeded 40 per cent.

Mr Suen refused to give an estimated turnout rate for next year's elections, saying they had no specific target in mind.

The district board elections will be held on March 3, those for the municipal councils on May 5, and those for Legco on September 15.

Experience has shown the heaviest turnout on weekday elections takes place after 7 pm, which means many voters can only find time to go to the polls after work.

The Government's aim is to make it more convenient for voters to go to the polls and to encourage a higher turnout.

Functional constituency elections will still be held on a working day before the direct elections. They will be on September 12 next year.

"This will avoid confusion among the electorate, many of whom may be eligible to vote in both direct elections and functional constituencies," Mr Suen said.

He also said the Government's election publicity campaign was aimed at urging young people between the ages of 21 and 25 years to register and vote.