

All eyes on Nomination Centres today

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There will not be any exam fever, but rather election fever, at nine schools scattered across Singapore today.

With classes suspended for Nomination Day today, these are the nine designated Nomination Centres where some 150-plus candidates - both from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and the opposition camps - will head to submit their applications to stand in the May 7 General Election.

The main centre of attraction is likely to be Deyi Secondary in Ang Mo Kio, where candidates gunning for the Aljunied, Bishan- Toa Payoh and Ang Mo Kio group representation constituencies (GRCs) will gather under one roof to file their papers.

Aljunied was the most hotly-contested GRC in the 2006 polls. The five-member team helmed by Foreign Minister George Yeo defeated the Workers' Party (WP) with 56.1 per cent of the vote, and both parties have said they are ready for a rematch.

WP chairman Sylvia Lim, who led her team in Aljunied then, has not yet revealed where she will be fielded this time around.

There has been speculation that the party could eventually field a 'dream team' comprising her, 50-year-old corporate lawyer Chen Show Mao and possibly even Hougang incumbent Low Thia Khiang.

Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC, meanwhile, is gearing up for its first electoral fight as the incumbents, led by Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng, look set to square off against 75-year-old veteran opposition leader Chiam See Tong, who is bidding for his first GRC victory having secured the Potong Pasir single seat since 1984.

As for Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Ang Mo Kio team, it is still a big question mark as to whether the Reform Party - which had earlier expressed interest in fielding a team there - will eventually turn up and contest.

There will be a carnival-like atmosphere at the Singapore Chinese Girls' School should 87-year-old Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew end up delivering the day's only victory speech with his Tanjong Pagar GRC team braced for a walkover victory.

This after the Socialist Front on Monday abruptly pulled out of its plans to contest there, its chief Ng Teck Siong citing a lack of funds and candidates as the main reasons. The Reform Party (RP), however, has kept mum about whether it could spring a late surprise and field a team there.

Over at Greenridge Secondary in Bukit Panjang, the Holland-Bukit Timah GRC candidates come face-to-face for the first time since the controversy over an online video that allegedly shows the Singapore Democratic Party's (SDP) Vincent Wijesingha discussing the promotion of the gay cause in Singapore.

The GRC's anchor minister Vivian Balakrishnan on Monday called for the SDP to explain its position on the matter and whether Dr Wijesingha would pursue the cause in the political arena.

On what she would be watching out for today, political commentator Gillian Koh said she was eager to find out if WP secretary-general Low Thia Khiang would leave his Hougang stronghold and join a GRC instead.

'I'm keen to know where the different parties will put their 'A' teams. The PAP has announced where its candidates are standing. The only surprise will be whether they will swap some ministers around. It will be a tactical move, as I'm not sure if they know entirely where the opposition will place their best candidates,' she said.

After Nomination Day today comes a week of intense campaigning and daily rallies, and Eugene Tan of the Singapore Management University's (SMU) Law Faculty said that he is looking forward to 'a very reasoned and principled engagement' of the issues concerning Singaporeans.

'In all the excitement, I hope the parties and voters alike will not get carried away by mere rhetoric,' said Assistant Professor Tan.

'It's up to the parties now to impress upon the people the issues that matter, and hopefully the voters will give these issues considered thought.'