

Election deposit raised to \$16,000

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The election deposit for each candidate contesting in the coming polls on May 7 has been raised to \$16,000, an increase of \$2,500 from the \$13,500 required in the last general election.

The new sum, which is an 18.5 per cent hike over the 2006 amount, was announced by the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Its statement also gave the names of the nine nomination centres where the candidates will hand in their papers for contesting in specified constituencies.

They will do so next Wednesday, which is Nomination Day.

The statement also named Mr Yam Ah Mee, chief executive director of the People's Association, as the Returning Officer.

The election deposit is not fixed.

It can change at each election, as under the Parliamentary Elections Act, each candidate's deposit has to be 8 per cent of the total allowances paid to a Member of Parliament in the preceding year, rounded to the nearest \$500.

But this sum will be forfeited should a candidate in a single-member constituency (SMC) or a team in a group representation constituency (GRC) secure less than 12.5 per cent of the votes in their constituency.

Analysts like Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh wondered if the increase would hinder smaller parties with more modest means from contesting the elections.

'Hopefully, it will not be too challenging for the parties to stump up,' she said, adding that the parties were aware of the likelihood of an increase as they have been trying to raise funds online.

At least one opposition party, Mr Chiam See Tong's Singapore People's Party, is saying it is not an obstacle.

Said its assistant secretary-general Wilfred Leung, who will contest in Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC with Mr Chiam: 'I was surprised it was increased. But we are all working professionals, so we won't have a problem raising the amount.'

He added that candidates who could not raise the deposit on short notice might find it hard to win voters' trust as credible candidates.

Under election rules, minority candidates in GRCs have to submit their applications to be certified as belonging to their respective racial groups by 1pm on Saturday.

They will hand in their applications at the Elections Department in Prinsep Link.

As in the 2006 elections, there will be nine nomination centres despite the rise in the number of constituencies, from 84 to 87 this year.

Also, there have been few changes in the nomination centres for the clusters of electoral divisions, with the most notable being that for Potong Pasir SMC.

How they are grouped is significant as it allows the parties to make a last-minute switch of candidates among the electoral divisions.

In 2006, Potong Pasir was grouped with Jalan Besar GRC and Tanjong Pagar GRC. Their nomination centre was Bendemeer Primary School.

For this election, Potong Pasir is grouped with Joo Chiat SMC, Mountbatten SMC and Marine Parade GRC. Their centre is Tao Nan School.