48 nominees vie for up to nine NMP seats

The list this time is longer than that put forward in the last round in 2004

BY LYNN LEE

A TOTAL of 48 people are in the running to be Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs), 11 more than in the last round in 2004.

One-quarter, or 12 of them, were put up by the six groups invited to do so.

They are the professional sector, business and industry, social and community services, media, arts and sports, the labour movement and tertiary education institutions.

The remaining 36 were nominated by members of the public, said a statement yesterday from the Clerk of Parliament's office. The statement did not give the names of the nominees.

A maximum of nine NMPs can be selected and these unelected members of the House can serve up to 2 1/2 years.

Law lecturer Eugene Tan said the longer list of names this time, compared to 37 in 2004, reflects a greater desire among Singaporeans to take part in the political and law-making process, among other things.

The NMP scheme has also gained public acceptance, said Mr Tan, from the Singapore Management University.

"The public generally perceives the NMPs as non-partisan and unfettered by the Whip as PAP MPs are, and without being combative or overly critical, as Opposition MPs are perceived to be."

However, he feels the scheme can be further enhanced if candidates openly declare their interest in the post, instead of staying anonymous, as is the case.

"If one is seeking to be accorded the right and privilege to speak in Parliament, all the more they should openly declare their applications."

A few have done so. They include Association of Muslim Professionals board member Ameen Talib, and young conservation advocates Louis Ng and Wilson Ang.

Others include Singapore Nurses Association president Tan Wee King, blind social worker Ron Chandran-Dudley and Tamil Language and Cultural Society president M. Harikrishnan.

At least three ex-NMPs are also said to be seeking a second term: Nature Society Singapore president Geh Min, biomedical company chief executive Tan Sze Wee and television artist Eunice Olsen, who also does volunteer work with youth.

The eight-member special select committee, chaired by Speaker Abdullah Tarmugi, will meet next month to decide on the names to recommend to Parliament.

"We want non-partisan voices. Age is not necessarily a factor, it's more important to have individuals who can give a voice to the various sectors."

JURONG GRC MP HALIMAH YACOB, one of the MPs on the eight-member special select committee

"There is no shortlisting per se, as all who are eligible will be considered and up to nine of the most suitable among them will be selected."

MPs on the committee said they wanted people who could contribute to the quality of debate in the House.

"We want non-partisan voices. Age is not necessarily a factor, it's more important to have individuals who can give a voice to the various sectors."

JURONG GRC MP HALIMAH YACOB