

Opposition parties eye Bukit Batok by-election seat

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Opposition parties on Saturday (Mar 12) came forth to state their intentions to contest an upcoming by-election, following the resignation of People's Action Party's (PAP) Member of Parliament (MP) for Bukit Batok SMC David Ong.

Citing "personal indiscretion" on his part, Mr Ong said stepping down was the "right thing to do" and it was "for the best interests of the party, (his) constituents and family".

In a news release, Secretary-General of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) Chee Soon Juan said his party "looks forward" to running in the by-election. "We will continue to push for the alternative policies that we advocated during the last GE and we look forward to be the people's voice in Parliament," he said.

On Facebook, the party said its campaign team has been activated already.

SDP was engaged in a three-cornered fight for the single-seat ward alongside PAP and independent candidate Samir Salim Neji in GE2015.

Responding to queries from 938LIVE, Mr Samir said it is "very likely" that he will stand in the upcoming by-election, adding that serving the public is something which he would like to do for the long term.

He said: "I've shown my intention during the last General Election, but I didn't have enough time to prepare during then. Now this has happened.

"I feel sad that we have to go for a by-election here at Bukit Batok, and I feel that I have the responsibility to come forward, and see if I could be supported."

However, Mr Samir said his final decision would depend on the other political parties. "I'll be looking at what the various political parties are going to decide on, especially the PAP.

"Are they bringing in a new candidate? Or would they support somebody like me, and consider me to be the candidate? If they support me, I'd be more than happy with it and go ahead with the recontest."

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chief Benjamin Pwee also told Channel NewsAsia he will be contesting the by-election. In GE2015, he ran for a seat in Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC under the banner of the Singapore People's Party but said he would represent DPP in vying for the SMC seat.

Noting that the electoral boundaries of Bukit Batok SMC lie next to Chua Chu Kang GRC, People's Power Party's (PPP) Goh Meng Seng said he will discuss with the SDP if the PPP should run for a Bukit Batok seat when the by-election takes place.

"We will respect SDP's decision first before we make any decision," the opposition veteran added.

Singapore Democratic Alliance chairman Desmond Lim said his party would have to meet first to decide on the matter. "We need to call for a CEC meeting to discuss among the members before we are able to make an announcement," Mr Lim said.

He added that there was "no hurry" to make a decision, as PM Lee has not yet decided when the by-election will be held.

Similarly, National Solidarity Party Secretary-General Lim Tean said: "We are studying the situation carefully and will make an announcement in due course as to whether we will be contesting the by-election."

The Reform Party's Secretary-General Kenneth Jeyaretnam said its Central Executive Committee will meet and decide "in due course". "We are not ruling out contesting, but it's too early to make a decision," he stated.

PAP NEEDS TO CONSIDER WHETHER TO FIELD HEAVYWEIGHT: ANALYST

One analyst told 938LIVE voters will more likely consider supporting an opposition candidate, as they are quite assured of a PAP Government in place.

Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director at the Institute of Policy Studies, also said it was "rather unfortunate" that PAP had no knowledge of this indiscretion before GE2015, as Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam had said. "We know that the Hougang and Punggol East by-elections were precipitated for the very same reasons," Dr Koh said.

"I think that the PAP or any other political parties should be quite wary and be alerting its parliamentarians of the danger of this sort of behaviour," she added. "Singaporeans are better served if they could ensure that they are as disciplined as possible. If that is indeed the case, there will be a high level of disappointment all around, even more so with the PAP camp."

Added Dr Koh: "I think the PAP will make its calculations based on who it thinks will be the opposition that would be gunning for that seat. The PAP will probably have to think quite seriously about sending a very strong heavyweight candidate to fight in an SMC if they think it's important to do so."

"They need to think who are the possible opposition candidates who would fight for Bukit Batok. In this case, the SDP's Dr Chee Soon Juan has said his party is looking forward to contest. If it's him, the PAP would have to find a credible enough candidate to take him on."

As for a likely date for the by-election, Dr Koh said it may take place "at least a month" after Singapore's Budget 2016. "From what we know of the national calendar in terms of political events, the Government would present its national budget on Mar 24. It's going to be a rather busy period for all parliamentarians for a month after that, I would say."

In GE2015, PAP's David Ong won with 73.02 per cent of the vote share in Bukit Batok SMC. SDP's Sadasivam Veriyah garnered 26.38 per cent of the vote while Mr Samir received 0.6 per cent of valid votes and lost his election deposit of S\$14,500.