

Opposition parties optimistic issues will be resolved by Thursday

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Opposition parties said they made progress in avoiding three-cornered fights at a meeting on Monday night (Aug 3). They are optimistic that outstanding issues will be resolved at the next meeting, scheduled for Thursday.

Monday's meeting lasted almost three hours and described by party representatives as one that was amicable and cooperative. They also said most of the issues involving the Single-Member and Group-Representation Constituencies have been resolved.

But some sticking points remain, and it is understood that Marine Parade GRC is one of them. It is the stomping ground of the National Solidarity Party - which contested there in 2011 - and the party is keen to return.

But the Workers' Party (WP) has indicated interest – especially now that Joo Chiat SMC will be absorbed into Marine Parade GRC in the next General Election.

In the 2011 General Election, the WP's Yee Jenn Jong lost the seat in Joo Chiat to the ruling People's Action Party's Charles Chong by just 388 votes.

Whether either party will budge on their decision to contest in that constituency is anyone's guess for now. A consensus might not even be reached at Thursday's meeting. A source told Channel NewsAsia several more private meetings between various parties might be needed to iron things out. Even so, political analysts say such meetings indicate a maturity in the way opposition parties interact with one another.

Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies said: "You have the Workers' Party making a big breakthrough in 2011, so it's really the leading Opposition party, and it probably feels the obligation to carry on, and go bigger and better. But then you've seen many little new parties bubbling up, and old parties being revived."

"And so, the general landscape of the Opposition party space in Singapore is becoming more complex, and just becoming more interesting and really more mature. Getting together, meeting, and discussing whether they'll be able to avoid three-cornered fights is actually a very mature process of negotiation and engagement. It's a far more complex landscape than we faced say, in 2006 - when we only had two opposition MPs," she added.

But another expert said it remains to be seen whether this amicability among the opposition could play out.

Dr Alan Chong, coordinator of the International Relations Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies said: "They realise that in order to gain the same level of prominence and success as WP, the rest of them are still very small fish. So for their electoral survivability, they have to form some kind of alliance. Then again, you never know if they are going to descend into petty bickering the moment Nomination Day is announced."

Dr Chong said that while it may seem hopeful that the Opposition Parties can sort out their differences, all bets could be off come Nomination Day