

Tactical decisions over GE 2015 line-up show how seriously PAP regards the coming contest: Analysts

Channel NewsAsia, 25 August 2015

SINGAPORE: The People's Action Party (PAP) has been unveiling its candidates for the upcoming election over the past two weeks. But the party has yet to formally introduce its candidates for East Coast, Marine Parade, Nee Soon and Aljunied Group Representation Constituencies (GRC). It also has not formally introduced its candidate for Fengshan Single Member Constituency (SMC).

The constituencies are mostly in the east, and also where the Workers' Party (WP) has announced its intention to contest.

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Dr Gillian Koh, believes the PAP is thinking of how best to shore up these wards to ensure that WP does not make more headway there.

"Tactically, I suppose it's really a question of intelligence-gathering, to see who the likely contenders there are for the WP," she said. "Who would the WP send, in order to try and secure Fengshan SMC, East Coast GRC, and Marine Parade GRC."

Associate Professor of Law at the Singapore Management University, Eugene Tan, said it is no coincidence that PAP is delaying its introductions in those constituencies. "Essentially when the PAP reveals its line-up, that gives the WP the chance to adjust their line-up accordingly, and this could convey some degree of tactical advantage, depending on how the WP uses it."

PAP Organising Secretary Ng Eng Hen had said the party wants to give voters more time to assess its candidates. But he also said that "there can always be last-minute changes" to the line-up before Nomination Day.

Still, Dr Koh said that even without formal introductions, it is already clear who the likely PAP candidates for the eastern constituencies would be.

She said: "In East Coast GRC, I think it's been made clear that the current MP there, Raymond Lim, would be standing down. And I think that there is some suggestion that the current MPs there will defend the smaller, re-constituted East Coast GRC.

"On Marine Parade GRC, I think it's clear that in the past days, the team of Tan Chuan-Jin, Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, Dr Fatimah Lateef, Edwin Tong, Seah Kian Peng, has been out there on the ground, so they've really been introduced, except for a sort of formal introduction."

Nee Soon GRC will also be a constituency to watch, said Assoc Prof Tan. "It represents as far west as the WP is contesting. That constituency could then be the staging post from where the party could either move further west or further up north," he said.

However, the WP has also been keeping its cards close to its chest. Party chairman Sylvia Lim has confirmed that all its current MPs will defend their constituencies, but the party has otherwise been tight-lipped about who its new candidates would be.

Associate Professor Alan Chong of the Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies said this shows there is a certain wisening up on both sides of the political divide. "They know the elections are a very serious contest, more serious than it has ever been in the last 40 years or so," he said.

"In the aftermath of the 2011 General Election, it is clear that WP cannot to be written off as a lucky set of Opposition candidates. The PAP might have to accept that Opposition candidates are now serious-minded individuals, respectable ones, and ones it has to mount a major effort to defeat.

"So, this would account for the curious waiting game on both sides. They want to see who shows his or her hand first. One side will announce its slate of candidates, and the other side will find someone to match them."