

## Who will fill Yaw Shin Leong's shoes?

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A day after the opposition Workers' Party (WP) announced it has sacked former Hougang Member of Parliament (MP) Yaw Shin Leong, speculation is rife over who will be fielded as candidates, should a by-election be held for the ward.

WP said this much during its news conference held Wednesday, that it will only reveal its candidate on nomination day.

But it didn't rule out the possibility that its two non-constituency MPs Yee Jenn Jong and Gerald Giam could be fielded.

With all eyes on Hougang, the question is will there be a three- or four-cornered fight?

Former presidential candidate Tan Jee Say, who also ran under the Singapore Democratic Party banner at the last General Election, said he does not rule out the possibility of contesting in Hougang as an independent candidate.

He said the first priority is to ensure Hougang remains in the hands of the opposition, and for that to happen, the opposition should work together to pick a candidate they can all agree on.

Secretary-General of the National Solidarity Party Hazel Poa said the party does not rule out the possibility of contesting in the by-election but its central executive council has to meet before making a decision.

Singapore Democratic Party's Secretary-General Chee Soon Juan, told Channel NewsAsia it will not contest in a by-election in Hougang, if the circumstances remain the way they are.

When asked for his response, Reform Party Secretary-General Kenneth Jeyaretnam said: "In the light of WP's protracted silence on this matter, individually and collectively, we find this decision somewhat surprising.

"By sacking Yaw, the WP leadership has denied the people of Hougang and the wider Singapore public, the accountability and transparency they crave," he said.

"So far, we have had a rumour followed by an official no comment followed by silence, followed by a sacking for silence, and finally a statement about that silence.

"My personal hope for the people of Hougang is that Mr Low (Thia Khiang) will persuade Eric Tan to rejoin the party. He can then put up a candidate of long-term good standing with the party and the people thereby minimising disruption."

The Singapore People's Party could not be reached for comment.

The timing of a by-election is the prerogative of the prime minister, and under the law, there is no fixed time within which he must call for one.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said he will consider the matter carefully.

Observers Channel NewsAsia spoke to say it's politically untenable for Hougang not to have an elected MP for the next four-and-a-half years.

As for Aljunied MPs looking after Hougang in the interim, observers say Aljunied MPs may step in but they do not have the authority of the MP in that constituency.

Senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies Gillian Koh said: "But the key question is that elected authority. The 'Hougangers' would want their own MP, no?"

Assistant professor of Law at the Singapore Management University Eugene Tan said: "The Constitution is silent for both the GRC (Group Representation Constituency) and SMC (Single Member Constituency).

"In a GRC, the seats are not vacated so the convention here is that the other MPs in the GRC would cover.

"In Hougang SMC, certainly until an MP is elected, the WP or any other party can provide MPS (meet the people session) but they will be providing it as a party service, and not as a Hougang MP of course."

In a speech delivered in Parliament in 2008 on the issue of by-elections, PM Lee had said "within the SMC, a neighbour will take care of the ward...It is the party's duty to look after its constituents until such time as an election is called."