

First-timer runs solo in new SMC

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Long-term PAP volunteer to contest Fengshan and will likely face WP opponent

For the first time in nearly three decades, the People's Action Party is fielding a first-time candidate to run solo in a new single-member constituency.

Ms Cheryl Chan, 38, who has been a party volunteer for 10 years, will contest Fengshan, which was carved out from East Coast GRC.

She is the first new PAP candidate to be fielded in a new SMC since the group representation constituency system was introduced in 1988.

She is expected to face an opponent from the Workers' Party who has yet to be named, and the Fengshan contest is already being talked about as a hot contest in this year's general election.

Ms Chan was introduced officially yesterday, putting to rest months of speculation over who would succeed incumbent MP Raymond Lim, who is quitting politics after 14 years.

ORH LUAK, LAKSA OR BAK CHOR MEE?

First, orh luak is not my favourite dish. The local hawker dish that I like most is laksa. And that's not likely to change. The Fengshan food centre at Block 85 is actually more famous for bak chor mee rather than orh luak!

MS CHERYL CHAN, responding to a question about the orh luak (fried oyster omelette) dish which drew praise from Workers' Party chairman Sylvia Lim. Ms Lim posted a photo earlier this month of herself eating orh luak in her first-ever Instagram post. It led to speculation that Ms Lim might move to contest in Fengshan. Ms Lim later announced that she will be staying in Aljunied GRC.

Mr Lim told reporters at the PAP Bedok branch that she is a new candidate but not an unfamiliar face in Fengshan: "She lived in Fengshan for many years and has been an active volunteer for more than a decade... She knows the ground well."

During this time, Ms Chan was actively involved in branch activities, supported Meet-the-People Sessions and conducted house visits. As chairman of the community club management committee, she also started a befrienders programme for lonely senior citizens.

Political observers said the work she has done and the rapport she established with residents will stand her in good stead against her opponent in the contest for votes.

"If she has been successful, she will have built up a good deal of political capital to tap on," said Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

Questions about Ms Chan's candidacy in Fengshan dominated much of the two-hour press conference, which also jointly presented the PAP's slate for East Coast GRC.

Among them: Why Fengshan was hived off and whether Ms Chan was being offered up as a "sacrificial lamb".

The suggestions were dismissed by Manpower Minister Lim Swee Say, the East Coast GRC's anchor minister.

"I'm aware that out there there's still speculation that Fengshan is being cut off because Fengshan is the weakest link in East Coast GRC. Completely untrue," he said.

He said that in the 2011 General Election, the level of support for the PAP in all five wards of the GRC was "fairly even".

His team won narrowly, beating the WP team by securing 54.8 per cent of the vote.