

## On the ground; Independents turn up at Elections Department

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Opposition party plans for straight fights with the People's Action Party (PAP) could be disrupted if independent candidates who turned up at the Elections Department carry through with their plans.

Seven people not affiliated to political parties were among 23 who were at the department in Prinsep Link to collect or submit forms yesterday - the first day nomination and other forms became available.

The total included representatives from all opposition parties intending to contest the Sept 11 election.

The seven potential independents included former Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) member Jarrod Luo, former National Solidarity Party secretary-general Tan Lam Siong and Mr Arthero Lim, who contested previous elections with the SDP, Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) and Reform Party.

But political analysts said it is unlikely independent candidates will have a big impact at the polls.

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said they would hardly affect the outcome, except in a very tight race between the main contenders.

"Opposition voters are typically mindful that they shouldn't split their vote," he added.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh said it is difficult for independents to get on the radar of voters and do well unless they are well known as leaders in their sectors or had built up some standing nationally.

"It is only when the better established opposition parties come up against each other that the threat of either splitting the vote or inviting voters to simply revert to an incumbent PAP exists," she said.

While independent candidates were common in legislative council and assembly elections in the 50s and 60s, with some winning seats, they did not fare well after the PAP came into power and Singapore gained independence in 1965.

The last time independent candidates contested a general election was in 2001.

Realtor Ooi Boon Ewe secured 16.5 per cent of the vote in Joo Chiat against the PAP's Chan Soo Sen; while stockbroker Tan Kim Chuang managed just 4.9 per cent in a three-cornered fight in Bukit Timah with the SDA's Tong Meng Chye and Dr Wang Kai Yuen of the PAP, who won the contest.

Early arrivals at the Elections Department yesterday included SDP chairman Jeffrey George. Representatives from the Singaporeans First party and PAP Ang Mo Kio GRC braved rain in the afternoon to collect nomination forms.

Mr Luo, 31, chief operating officer of a software development firm collected four sets of forms - two for GRCs and two for single-seat wards - but declined to reveal his plans.

Mr Arthero Lim, 60, said he was in talks with and may join a party.

The Workers' Party's Gerald Giam and Muhamad Faisal Abdul Manap were there to submit forms on candidates' Political Donation Certificates and certificates from the Malay Community Committee and the Indian and Other Minority Communities Committee. "We thought we should submit them well ahead of the Aug 28 deadline so as not to have any last-minute scramble," said Mr Giam.

The others who said they would contest as independents were private taxi driver Shirwin Eu in Bukit Panjang; former businessman Zeng Guoyuan in Potong Pasir; Mr Ooi in Sengkang West; and blogger Han Hui Hui - who said later in a Facebook post that she is eyeing Radin Mas.

Forms can also be downloaded from the Elections Department's website.