

## **WP leaders Pritam Singh, Sylvia Lim retain posts, former MP Lee Li Lian returns to CEC**

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SINGAPORE - Workers' Party (WP) secretary-general Pritam Singh and chairwoman Sylvia Lim were returned to their posts at the party's biennial conference on June 30, paving the way for them to lead the opposition party into the next general election (GE).

The party's cadres also re-elected the other WP MPs into the central executive committee (CEC), along with former party chief Low Thia Khiang, 68, in an internal election marked by continuity.

The MPs are Aljunied GRC MPs Faisal Manap, 49, and Gerald Giam, 47; Sengkang GRC MPs He Ting Ru, 41, Louis Chua, 37, and Jamus Lim, 48; and Hougang MP Dennis Tan, 54.

Party sources told The Straits Times that Ms Lim, 59, was again challenged by long-time WP member Tan Bin Seng, but prevailed with about two-thirds of the vote to retain the post of party chair, which she has held since 2003.

Mr Singh, 48, was returned unopposed.

There was a new addition to the CEC – former Punggol East MP Lee Li Lian, 46, who had stepped down from the party's top decision-making body in 2020. The CEC line-up remains unchanged, apart from Ms Lee returning.

She was MP for Punggol East from 2013 to 2015, before ceding the single seat to PAP MP Charles Chong in the 2015 GE. Punggol East became part of the newly formed Sengkang GRC in 2020, and Ms Lee is currently a town councillor on the WP-run Sengkang Town Council.

Rounding out the 14-member line-up are former GE candidates Nathaniel Koh, 41, and Kenneth Foo, 47; as well as Mr Tan Kong Soon, 47, and Mr Ang Boon Yaw, 42, a lawyer who started volunteering with the party in 2012.

About 80 cadres cast their votes at the closed-door conference held at the Huone meeting and event venue in Clarke Quay on June 30.

Speaking to reporters after the conference, Mr Singh said it was a "fantastic result". "We are looking forward to working with this CEC for the next two years," he added.

In a statement, WP said it will announce the CEC appointments in due course. "The new CEC has taken office, with a mix of members of different ages and backgrounds; and has started work with immediate effect."

In the past six months, WP has stepped up its outreach efforts, going to its usual stomping grounds to sell its Hammer newsletter and also making more house visits in areas it has contested in the past.

The upcoming GE, due by November 2025, will be Mr Singh's second at the helm.

In his first election outing as WP chief in 2020, the party achieved a watershed victory in Sengkang GRC, only the second such multi-member constituency to be won by an opposition party. The WP had first achieved the feat in 2011, when it pulled off a shock defeat of the People's Action Party in Aljunied GRC.

After the 2020 election, Mr Singh was made Leader of the Opposition.

But he has faced several crises in the past few years, most recently when he was charged in March 2024 with lying to a parliamentary committee.

The committee was investigating the conduct of Ms Raeesah Khan, 30, then a WP MP for Sengkang GRC, after she admitted to lying in Parliament about a sexual assault victim being treated shabbily by the police.

Mr Singh was asked in December 2021 about the matter by the committee, which later found that he had lied and referred the matter to the public prosecutor.

In 2023, Mr Singh also had to deal with the emergence online of a video clip that showed two key WP leaders, Mr Leon Perera, 53, and Ms Nicole Seah, 37, sharing an intimate moment.

Mr Perera, who was then an Aljunied GRC MP, and Ms Seah, who was part of the WP East Coast GRC team in the 2020 GE, eventually left the party over the incident.

Sunday's uneventful election signals that the party has closed ranks behind Mr Singh's leadership.

Commenting on the election result, analysts said WP sent a signal of continuity to Singaporeans, by maintaining the status quo.

National University of Singapore (NUS) associate professor of political science Chong Ja Ian said the party appears to be keeping its footing despite the recent challenges.

Singapore Management University law don and former Nominated MP Eugene Tan said the result suggests party unity will not be a significant issue as WP gears up for the GE.

"Notwithstanding the setbacks, (WP chief) Pritam's grip on power in his party has arguably strengthened with this party election," he added.

At the same time, while Mr Singh's standing in the party is strong and secure, cadres are also "comforted to have Mr Low remain in the decision-making body", noted Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh.

Together with Ms Lee's return to the CEC, the party appears to be "building on what it has and who it trusts", she added.

Noting that Ms Lee had worked the ground before the 2020 GE in Sengkang GRC, Dr Koh said she will be a boon as WP plans its next campaign.

Associate Professor Tan said Mr Low's presence in the CEC points to his continued relevance as a stabilising force in the party, adding that the respected former party leader may well contest the upcoming GE.

NUS associate professor of political science Bilveer Singh said having established and credible former MPs who can step in will allow WP to weather “possible shocks” like the loss of one of its leaders.

Meanwhile, Prof Chong said it is a positive sign that WP now has more women in the CEC, adding that political parties seeking popular support should strive towards being more representative of the population.