

SDP proposes joint campaign with WP for Punggol East

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The Punggol East contest heated up yesterday, with more turning up to collect nomination forms from the Elections Department, and the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) making an unusual proposal to the Workers' Party (WP), which was roundly denounced by political observers.

SDP Secretary-General Chee Soon Juan proposed that the two parties run a joint campaign and field a "unity candidate" from the SDP, in the "spirit of compromise and cooperation".

"If victorious, the SDP candidate will enter Parliament and the WP will run the Punggol East Town Council," he said at a press conference yesterday evening.

Dr Chee said the "win-win situation" would lay the ground for a larger opposition representation at the next General Election.

By running the town council, the WP "would have added clout in their town council management and access to the Punggol East grassroots network". The SDP, meanwhile, would be able to table and debate the Government on its alternative policies.

Dr Chee said he had emailed the SDP's proposal to the WP, inviting it to a meeting today. "I'm under no illusion that there are differences in our approach, even in some of our policies ... but we also have some things in common," he said.

Asked if the proposal was about preserving the SDP's interest, Dr Chee said: "If it was really preserving in the SDP's interest, we would be having this deal very favourable to the SDP. But we've said already ... cut it down the middle, both parties give ... we can't have everything."

Responding to media queries, the WP said it has noted the SDP's proposal. "Our focus continues to be fulfilling our promise to offer a choice to voters in Punggol East," said WP Media Chair Gerald Giam.

Describing the move as "the politics of desperation", National University of Singapore Associate Professor Bilveer Singh felt the SDP's communication with the WP through public channels "shows the sorry state of affairs of SDP's communications with other parties".

Said Singapore Management University Assistant Professor Eugene Tan: "It's laughable ... they want to be the third opposition party in Parliament, but they don't want ... the hard work of running the town council."

He also noted the unfeasibility of the proposal: "Let's say Punggol East is poorly managed, not cleaned properly. The SDP MP, if elected, is going to say, 'look it's not my fault, if you're not happy go and look for the WP'."

Institute of Policy Studies Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh said: "I cannot imagine (WP) taking up this high-risk strategy of not only having to work among different personalities but parties and clearly, culture, and yet deliver in terms of all that is expected that an MP should do."

Meanwhile, Hougang MP Png Eng Huat of the WP collected one set of nomination forms, accompanied by WP Organising Secretary and Deputy Chairman of the Aljunied Constituency Committee Ng Swee Bee, at the Elections Department yesterday afternoon.

TODAY understands that the WP is waiting for party Chairman Sylvia Lim to return from an overseas trip this morning before deciding on by-election matters.

Reform Party chief Kenneth Jeyaretnam submitted his application for a Political Donation Certificate and said he was in talks with the WP, but did not give details.

Mr Richard Ang, a Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) volunteer, told reporters he was collecting four sets of papers on behalf of SDA chief Desmond Lim, who yesterday evening attended a barbecue party organised by the Punggol East Residents Movement at the constituency, supported by the SDA.

Mr Mohamad Hamim Aliyas, a former member of the Singapore People's Party, collected one set of forms for another former member of the party, Mr Benjamin Pwee, who has indicated interest in standing as an independent candidate.

People's Action Party MP Alex Yam (Chua Chu Kang GRC) picked up a set of forms, while his party's candidate, Mr Koh Poh Koon, said on his Facebook page that he had met the Housing and Development Board on the Rivervale Plaza upgrading issue.