

SDP will face uphill task in securing large vote swing: Analysts ; Residents want someone who can manage their town council and see to their needs

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Regardless of who contests in their constituency, Bukit Batok SMC residents said they are most concerned about having someone who can effectively manage their town council and see to their needs.

And while analysts noted that the “by-election effect” will hold doubly true in the upcoming by-election to be held in the ward — given Dr Chee Soon Juan’s prominence — they said the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) will face an uphill task in securing a vote swing of this magnitude.

Residents interviewed about the news of Dr Chee declaring his candidacy yesterday reacted coolly, with some reserving judgment until the People’s Action Party (PAP) unveils its candidate today.

Mr Hafazul Haji Asad, 73, a retiree, said: “It doesn’t matter whether (the next MP) is from the opposition party or the PAP, as long as he or she can take care of our estate.”

While noting that a straight fight would eliminate the risks of a dilution of votes for Dr Chee, political analysts said it will be challenging for the SDP to gain a nearly-24 percentage point vote swing — the SDP’s losing candidate got 26.4 per cent of the votes in a three-corner fight in 2015.

Institute of Policy Studies’ deputy director of research Gillian Koh said the PAP’s advantage is its track record in the area, and the support that its candidate will get from political heavyweights, such as Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who anchors neighbouring Jurong GRC.

She also contrasted Bukit Batok to other constituencies such as Fengshan, which has a significant proportion of Professionals, Managers, and Executives (PMEs) who are more likely to want an alternative voice in Parliament.

“That’s not the case in Bukit Batok. And (Mr) Tharman is the one that is viewed as leading the vanguard on dealing with people’s day-to-day issues and changing policies towards the left,” Dr Koh added.

Nevertheless, Dr Chee’s candidacy makes the by-election effect “hold doubly true” firstly because of his standing in the SDP, which she said can be regarded as second to the Workers’ Party (WP) in political standing. Dr Chee has also been changing his and the party’s image to focus on public policies affecting people’s daily lives, Dr Koh added.

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan, however, questioned if infectious disease physician Paul Tambyah would have been a better candidate for the SDP.

“It is not clear if Dr Chee is rehabilitated politically. In such a situation, I think contesting in a SMC would be probably premature as his record will come under intense scrutiny,” he said.

“It is a double-edged sword for Dr Chee to so prominently campaign on the themes of openness, accountability and transparency.”

Resident Peter Lim, 60, also said a candidate’s track record matters to him, citing an incident during the 2001 General Election where Dr Chee defamed Mr Goh Chok Tong.

“Why must we choose someone who has already proven he cannot control his temper?” said Mr Lim.

The Bukit Batok seat was vacated after PAP MP David Ong resigned over an alleged extramarital affair with a grassroots volunteer in his ward.