

Sitting WP MPs to defend their wards

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Amid speculation that the Workers' Party's (WP) big guns could move out of their home turf to contest in other constituencies, WP chairman Sylvia Lim said yesterday that all seven of the party's elected Members of Parliament (MPs) will be staying put to defend their wards in the coming elections.

An Instagram post by WP chairman Sylvia Lim last week of her eating at Fengshan Single-Member Constituency had fanned speculation that the Aljunied Group Representation Constituency (GRC) MP could strike out on her own.

Speaking to reporters at Chong Pang Market where WP supporters and members were selling its newspaper, Ms Lim quelled the talk by announcing that the WP will retain its slate for Aljunied GRC, as well as the Hougang and Punggol East single-seat wards.

She said: "We found that in the last four years, our experience in Aljunied has been fulfilling. We also have our challenges (and) throughout this period, there have been residents who inspired us by coming forward to give us encouragement because they believe in us."

Earlier this month, WP chief Low Thia Khiang was the first from the party to declare that he would not be moving out of his constituency.

Nevertheless, Ms Lim said the party had given some thoughts to moving one of more of its members out to make new inroads. "On consideration, we decided that it is meaningful for us to remain as a team to seek (residents') mandate for the next term," she said.

She added that all the WP MPs will be helping the party's other candidates to canvass support in the various constituencies.

On whether the saga over the financial lapses of the WP-run Aljunied-Hougang-Punggol East Town Council (AHPETC) had affected sentiment among the residents — and thus render it unwise for the MPs to move out instead of staying put and being accountable — Ms Lim would say only that the party would "leave it to residents and the public to judge what is exactly going on".

She also revealed that AHPETC's audited financial figures would be released at the end of the month.

The WP entourage in Nee Soon GRC consisted of several new faces who had been touted as potential candidates, including Singapore Cancer Society officer Kenneth Foo, 38, consultant Cheryl Denise Loh, 31, trainee lawyer Shaneet Rai, 27, property agent Ron Tan, 30, bank manager Dylan Ng, 40, holding company chief executive Luke Koh, 40, and project executive Bernard Chen, 29.

Since last week, the People's Action Party has started introducing its candidates. Breaking from tradition, the ruling party is also unveiling its slate before Nomination Day, barring last-minute changes.

Ms Lim reiterated that the WP would introduce its candidates when it is ready and this would probably be "some time" after National Day Rally on Sunday.

Political analyst Gillian Koh said she was surprised by the WP's decision to keep its Aljunied GRC team intact for the coming polls.

Dr Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, felt the party could perhaps be worried about losing Aljunied GRC if the team is split.

By staying in Aljunied GRC, both Ms Lim and Mr Low may also campaign in other constituencies with “some level of comfort” that their party can successfully defend its home turf, Dr Koh said.

“If on the other hand, they were quite confident about Aljunied GRC and were interested in extending their reach, it might have been more effective to have two GRC teams headed by their two leaders and best-known WP politicians,” she added.

Both Dr Koh and Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said WP’s decision showed that its leaders were confident of the party’s other candidates.

Still, Associate Professor Tan felt that WP did explore the idea of moving its big guns out to try to win more constituencies. “But it’s clear they know where their priorities lie and that an incremental approach, as opposed to an aggressive and ambitious tack, is tactically more apt,” he said.

“There is the imperative to consolidate their hold of Aljunied GRC, their crown jewel. They are signalling that they do not take their Aljunied residents for granted and the same team will work through the AHPETC issues,” he added.

Assoc Prof Tan noted that the decision would also help “shut out further PAP criticism that (the WP) is seeking new political pastures for the sake of doing so”.

Dr Koh and Assoc Prof Tan felt it was unlikely that the WP could renege on its decision and spring surprises on Nomination Day. “Should the WP ... deploy either Mr Low or Ms Lim in other wards at the eleventh hour, it will not go down well with Aljunied GRC voters,” said Assoc Prof Tan.

“Such a switch, even if tactical, would also result in the campaign being side-tracked by this matter. It will become the proverbial lightning rod.”

Speaking to reporters, Ms Lim also played down the absence of WP MPs from the National Day Rally this Sunday, which clashes with a grassroots event — an SG50 celebration dinner for residents that the party has been planning since last year.

Adding that she was “not sure why people are trying to create an issue out of it”, she said of the grassroots event: “We think it is meaningful for us, especially as an opposition party, to rally our supporters, to remind everyone what we want is to actually have betterment for Singapore as a whole.”

She added: “I think people sometimes get confused and they cannot distinguish between national issues and ruling-party interests. We want to underscore the point that even if you are an opposition supporter, you can be as loyal to Singapore as any PAP supporter.”