

## **WP names Pritam Singh as its assistant secretary-general ; Position, reinstated after being vacant for about a decade, was once held by Low Thia Kiang**

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Following a leadership challenge within the Workers' Party (WP), the party has reinstated the position of assistant secretary-general, with Mr Pritam Singh appointed the second-in-command, although analysts said it was too soon to say if the Aljunied GRC Member of Parliament and Aljunied-Hougang Town Council chairman is a front-runner to succeed party chief Low Thia Kiang.

The assistant secretary-general position had been vacant for about a decade, and was once held by Mr Low himself.

Mr Singh was previously the party's organising secretary. Mr Png Eng Huat, previously a council member, is now organising secretary, while Mr Chen Show Mao, who challenged Mr Low for the top post during the party's biennial Central Executive Council (CEC) elections over a week ago, kept his treasurer post.

Mr Muhamad Faisal Abdul Manap, previously a council member, is now the party's vice-chairman.

The WP announced its line-up of office bearers late last night, on the back of some party members voicing unhappiness over aspects of Mr Low's leadership — namely what they felt was his "autocratic" hold on the party, and his preference for "professional" candidates.

Mr Low later acknowledged the discontentment, but stressed that there were ample avenues for members to raise feedback internally, and said the debate reflected a healthy democracy within the party.

The WP did away with the role of assistant secretary-general in 2006, with Mr Low saying then that there was no need for the position as the CEC at the time was relatively young and needed time to grow. Before that, former party members Poh Li Guan and James Gomez held the roles of first and second assistant secretary-generals, respectively.

Mr Low became WP's assistant secretary-general in 1991, and held that post until he replaced Mr JB Jeyaretnam as secretary-general in 2001.

Mr Singh could not be reached for comment. Political analysts TODAY spoke to said the new positions were a step towards leadership renewal and injected diversity into the party's top ranks.

Assistant Professor Woo Jun Jie, from the Nanyang Technological University's School of Humanities and Social Sciences, said the appointments of Mr Singh, 40, and Mr Faisal, 41, gave "younger members a chance at experiencing leadership roles and responsibilities".

He pointed out that Mr Singh was "the most experienced among the younger members" who has taken up "very heavy duty town council work" as the chairman of the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council.

However, he said it was too early to tell if Mr Singh and Mr Faisal were in line to succeed Mr Low, 59, and Ms Sylvia Lim, 51, as secretary-general and chairman, respectively. “We’re not likely to be able to tell until the next few (CEC) elections,” he said.

Likewise, Institute of Policy Studies deputy director of research Gillian Koh noted that other younger members such as Mr Gerald Giam, 38, and the party’s Non-Constituency Members of Parliament (NCMPs) Dr Daniel Goh, 42, and Mr Leon Perera, 45, have also been placed in leadership roles.

Both also noted the appointment of Mr Singh and Mr Faisal helped address a perception that the party was Chinese-dominated. Dr Koh noted there were occasions when the party’s minority members were unhappy over their progression within party ranks, such as in the lead-up to the 2011 General Election.

“This is a good way for the WP to build up a multiracial ... quotient,” she added.

Meanwhile, Mr Kenneth Foo Seck Guan, 39, remains deputy organising secretary, joined by Mr Tan Kong Soon, 39, a new face to the CEC who serves as Mr Low’s legislative assistant.

Mr Dennis Tan, 45, one of the party’s new faces in the General Election last year and also an NCMP, is now deputy treasurer, after serving as council member previously.

Dr Goh remains chair of the media team. He also previously held the role of Youth Wing chairman, a position now turned over to Mr Giam.

Mr Perera is now webmaster and deputy chair of the party’s media team, after previously serving as a member of the team.

Chocolate manufacturer Firuz Khan 49, the other party’s other new entrant to the CEC, is deputy webmaster, while Ms Lee Li Lian, previously the organising secretary, is now a council member.

The current CEC’s term ends in 2018.