

What do Radin Mas residents care about? More facilities for elderly, please.

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Radin Mas Ayu was a Javanese princess, famed for being a filial daughter who sacrificed herself to save her father.

Some residents of Radin Mas - named after this princess - wish for filial children too.

Retiree Teo Kim Hoong, 58, said his children, a son and a daughter both in their 30s, rarely visit as they are too busy with work.

So Mr Teo spends his time shooting the breeze with his three neighbours at a nearby precinct pavilion every day.

Like him, they are retirees.

About 31,001 voters live in the Single Member Constituency (SMC), according to the Singapore Elections Department website.

One in three residents is above 55.

The national average is one in five.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had called Radin Mas "a glimpse of our future" back in his National Day Rally speech in 2007.

Radin Mas is a microcosm of Singapore with an ageing population.

Formerly part of Tanjong Pagar GRC, Radin Mas estate was carved out as an SMC last month following the Electoral Boundaries Report.

Taxi driver Chay Tat Yong, 45, who has lived in his rental flat for 11 years, said: "I think being an SMC is better than a GRC as we need one specific MP to come and take care of the place.

"Every day, I see many elderly people walking around the area. There should be more care centres and activities for the elderly."

The New Paper's poll of 100 residents who belong to the Radin Mas SMC in Telok Blangah, Bukit Purmei and Jalan Bukit Merah revealed that about 61 per cent would raise municipal issues with candidates.

For example, residents want to be part of the lift upgrading programmes (LUP).

They wish their estate would be cleaner.

They also want exercise corners and more benches for those short breaks.

Housewife Alice Cai, 60, would like the LUP to be extended to her block soon.

Madam Cai lives in a Jalan Bukit Merah four-room flat with her retiree husband.

She takes a lift to the fifth floor and climbs the stairs to her sixth-floor flat every day.

"It's a bit tiring, climbing up and down. I hope the authorities will give this block a fresh coat of paint too. It's getting old," she said in Mandarin.

She and her husband have lived there for the last 30 years.

Mr Sam Tan of the People's Action Party (PAP) and Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC told The New Paper the primary concerns of residents are cost of living, financial assistance and the cleanliness of the estate.

And that's because of the large number of elderly people and low-income earners in the constituency.

He counted five different centres in his estate that are managed by the different Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWO) to serve the needs of the elderly.

The Lions Befrienders Service Association said they serve about 129 elderly in the Radin Mas area under their befriending programme.

The VWO's members are made up of lonely senior citizens.

"It's a fairly high concentration here, maybe due to more pro-active referrals from CDC and grassroots leaders, and a higher number of one-room flats in this area," said spokesman Eric Cheong. In comparison, Hougang area has about 58 members while Kreta Ayer has the highest concentration of about 250 members.

This befrienders programme is targeted at those who are aged above 65, living alone, and are financially strapped (usually on public assistance).

Under this programme, volunteers check on these elderly people regularly to give them emotional and psychological support.

Said Mr Cheong: "Because of their financial situation, they (the elderly) ask for material items like hongbao and daily necessities.

"We link them with sponsors who will provide them with ration distributions and even hot meals.

"But we go beyond that and also provide them with the emotional support through social activities like outings so that they don't feel lonely."

The bulk of the HDB flats here - about 61 per cent - are three-room types and below. Of the 109 HDB residential blocks in Radin Mas, 77 have benefited from upgrading, according to the Tanjong Pagar Town Council website.

The estate has gone through various upgrading programmes - Main Upgrading Programme, Interim Upgrading Programme (IUP) and LUP.

Ongoing upgrading programmes

Ongoing upgrading programmes include IUP, LUP and the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

While the residents have asked for LUP, some said they cannot afford to co-pay.

But MP Tan said there are various HDB financial schemes in place to aid this group, and even those aged above 55.

He added: "If repayment is an issue, we'll try to look at the family situation and see if we can give the children bursaries to lessen their expenses or even provide them with short-term financial grants."

Residents like Madam Cai rely on savings and what their children give them.

Her children - aged 31 to 39 - have moved away.

But some of their grandchildren stay with them on weekdays.

They bought their flat for about \$100,000 in the 1980s.

The last time she voted was in 1984.

In 1988, Radin Mas became part of Tiong Bahru GRC.

In 1991, it was absorbed into Tanjong Pagar GRC.

Today, Radin Mas faces the prospect of a five-cornered fight.

It's one that the opposition dreads, as this could dilute their share of votes.

Reform Party (RP), the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA), National Solidarity Party (NSP) and Socialist Front (SF) have expressed interest in the estate.

Mr Mohd Nazem Suki, Secretary-General of the Singapore Malay National Organisation (PKMS) - part of SDA - said he had offered to contest in this constituency last week.

Said Mr Nazem: "Our objective is to be united and to win, so it's likely we'll field only one party there."

Mr Nazem quipped that this estate is popular among the opposition because it's next to Tanjong Pagar GRC, which is helmed by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew.

He said: "We want to be side by side with Mr Lee.

"This estate is fully developed and has quite a diverse community. I don't sense much unhappiness on the ground.

"But it's an untested area because it has been under Tanjong Pagar GRC for the longest time."

Of the likely contest, MP Tan said: "I really don't know why they (opposition parties) planted their party flags here."

"But I've to fight my own battles and see whether I can win the hearts and minds of my voters."

Mr Tan said that from his house visits, he can tell that the residents were excited about the prospect of voting.

And that's a good sign.

He added: "The last thing I want is no one coming to contest in my ward."

"I also want to know how the residents see my work there. The best way to know is through a ballot box."

"Out of courtesy, they may say they like you, but you'll never know until they cast their votes."

But in an estate where one in three is above 55, the convention is that these elderly voters will go with PAP.

Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), said: "Based on the IPS survey after the 2006 elections, the older, lower-income group does tend to support the PAP, presumably because they benefit and feel the effects of the redistribution of wealth through PAP's policies."