

Opposition members Ravi Philemon, Michelle Lee seek to form new political party called Red Dot United

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Two former members of the Progress Singapore Party (PSP), Mr Ravi Philemon and Ms Michelle Lee, are seeking to form a new political party called Red Dot United. This is with the aim of contesting in the coming General Election (GE) if the party's registration goes through in time.

The pair made the announcement during a media briefing on Friday (May 29), held over video conferencing platform Zoom. For now, their 12-member party consists of a mix of former opposition party members, including two other former PSP members and those new to the political scene.

Political analysts had previously told TODAY that the next GE is likely to be held in July.

Mr Philemon, 52, said that his party has not decided which constituencies to contest in, should it take part in the GE.

On Tuesday, he and Ms Lee submitted an application to register Red Dot United as a political party to the Registry of Societies. On average, the processing time would be about two months.

Mr Philemon, who is set to be the party's secretary-general, said that he intends to write in to the registry to expedite the process.

Even so, Ms Lee, 43, who will be the party's chairman, said: "We are certainly not rushing. We have a longer-term view.

"Our goal is also something other than winning in the elections. It is about preparing the hearts and minds of Singaporeans to grow in maturity and understanding of politics in Singapore."

Reading from a statement, Mr Philemon said that the goal of the party is to "build a political-social platform" and not just be "another political party".

"Matters of government and policy must be accessible and easily understood by all Singaporeans, whether old or young or a new citizen," he said. "To be a robust nation and society, we must educate, enable and empower our citizens to engage in dialogue and effective debate without fear."

Mr Philemon added that what will differentiate Red Dot United from other opposition parties here is that it will not be "centred on personalities".

A "large segment" of members are below the age of 35, and the party will be "focusing on youths and engaging with youths as well".

Overall, the party members are aged between 25 and 55, with three members under the age of 30, Mr Philemon said. They include business owners and those who are in the medical and legal practice, Ms Lee added.

REASONS FOR LEAVING PSP

This announcement comes days after PSP secretary-general Tan Cheng Bock said that there have been people with "big egos" who joined PSP out of self-interest, instead of contributing to Singapore's development, and that he would "not feel sorry" if these people left the party.

Mr Philemon had resigned from PSP earlier this month and Ms Lee, who was vice-chairman, left the party in March, saying that she wanted to spend more time with her family and that she would be leaving politics.

When asked why she was stepping back into politics even though it would take time away from her family, Ms Lee said that PSP had grown very quickly and that the groundwork she had had to do for the party was "very intensive".

"Furthermore, because PSP was so large, just to organise and to decide on things took a lot of time as well, because there were many parties involved and a lot of discussions," she said.

A smaller party would be "more focused" in its objectives, she added.

Before joining PSP, Ms Lee was a member of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) and had been an SDP candidate for the Holland-Bukit Timah Group Representation Constituency during the 2011 GE.

When pressed on why they had both left PSP, Mr Philemon would only say "It is possible that we asked too many questions" and declined to elaborate.

He added that they had reached out to Dr Tan and other PSP central executive committee members to inform them of Red Dot United's plans and had "received a warm response".

Before joining PSP in July last year, Mr Philemon was a member of the Singapore People's Party (SPP).

He had joined SPP in March 2015 after leaving the National Solidarity Party, of which he had been a member since 2012.

He contested in the 2015 GE under the SPP banner in Hong Kah North Single Member Constituency.

AN OVER-SATURATED OPPOSITION SCENE?

If Red Dot United's application is approved by the Registry of Societies, it would bring the total number of opposition parties here to 12.

Law lecturer Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University said that if Red Dot United fails to differentiate itself from other political parties, it would "add to what is already a very crowded opposition landscape" and be "lost in the spectrum of many different parties".

While Red Dot United plans to differentiate itself by focusing on policies rather than personalities, Assoc Prof Tan pointed out: "To say that personalities don't matter, they are probably underestimating the importance of people. Obviously, a party that can blend people, policy and programme would be the best combination."

The founding members of Red Dot United are by no means new to the political scene. Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director of research at the Institute of Policy Studies, said that the creation of a new political party might indicate they felt PSP had lacked.

“At this point, in wanting to set up a new party, they are signalling that there is nothing in the market that they have been through and scrutinised which addresses what they are trying to focus on,” she said.

“It can be read as this: Even (PSP) was not good enough in hitting the mark in terms of policy discussion, or perhaps it was still too much focused on personality.”

Assoc Prof Tan said that if the GE is held before the new party is registered, it may be a “blessing in disguise”.

“It gives the party time to properly establish its identity and branding, and not go into the hustings while voters know very little or hardly anything about it,” he said.