

Analysts say call for Punggol East by-election is speedy but not surprising



Analysts say the Prime Minister's call for a by-election is a speedy one - but not surprising, given how the Punggol East seat was vacated.

Political observer Zulkifli Baharudin says the move should protect the goodwill of the People's Action Party.

"In this particular instance I don't think the Prime Minister wants to be accused of hampering opposition ambition to want to take the seat at Punggol East. So I think he's called for a by-election as soon as he possibly can."

Assistant Professor Eugene Tan says the decision could come across as counter-intuitive;

"But I think PM Lee would like to clear the decks, to enable Singaporeans to focus on the big issues, such as the White Paper on Population, and Our Singapore Conversation. If the by-election is going to be a distraction then it's important that that distraction be taken out."

Both analysts expect the People's Action Party to field a new candidate.

Mr Zulkifli.

"If you look at PAP's commitment to reform and renewal, I think you're likely to see new faces, probably somebody quite different from the past. That will be quite a good move going forward."

On the opposition side, several parties have earlier indicated their interest in the election.

What's interesting to watch, Professor Tan says, is how the opposition will manage what promises to be a keen contest.

"How are they going to avoid a multi-cornered fight? Which will essentially be advantageous to the People's Action Party. In the next six days we're going to see a lot of posturing, a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiations, and that will add to the overall excitement."