

Will there be a by-election in Punggol East?

By Tan Weizhen, TODAY | Posted: 13 December 2012 0758 hrs



SINGAPORE: While the by-election in Hougang earlier this year was called under identical circumstances - where an incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) vacated his seat because of an extramarital affair - political analysts TODAY spoke to were split over whether it could be used to gauge if and when a by-election will be held in Punggol East, following the resignation of its MP, Mr Michael Palmer.

The Hougang by-election was called about three months after former MP Yaw Shin Leong was expelled from the Workers' Party for "indiscretions in personal life", after rumours had emerged about an affair with a fellow party member.

Institute of Policy Studies Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh said any by-election could follow a timeline and process that is similar to the recent Hougang by-election.

Dr Koh said: "The public and residents in the SMC (Single Member Constituency) may expect the same kind of resolution as the Hougang case even if (the constituency) is supported by the massive PAP machinery and voted the PAP in the majority in the General Election last year."

Former Nominated MP Zulkifli Baharudin felt that a by-election would be called in less than three months.

"(The PAP) would make a quick decision. Looking at the way they have been handling this whole matter, I think they would get on with it as fast as possible, as there is no point in dragging this," he said.

But Assistant Professor Eugene Tan, a law lecturer at the Singapore Management University, disagreed.

It could be much longer - in about six to 12 months - before one might be held, given the

packed political calendar in the months ahead, he said.

Asst Prof Tan, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament, noted that for example, Parliament is set to discuss a White Paper on population and Budget 2013 in the first few months of next year.

He added: "Generally, the longer the time interval is between the vacating of the seat, and the by-election, the better it is (for the party)."

In fact, there is no certainty that a by-election will be called in Punggol East, Asst Prof Tan pointed out.

There is the question of "whether the People's Action Party wants to create a political norm, to call for a by-election whenever a seat is being vacated", he added.

Should a by-election be called in Punggol East, it will be the fourth election held in the country in a short span of time - after the General Election and Presidential Election last year, and the Hougang by-election earlier this year.

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