

PAP was 'swift and resolute'

Political observers analyse Mr Palmer's resignation

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WHEN Mr Michael Palmer stepped down as the Speaker of the House of Parliament and Member of Parliament yesterday, comparisons were drawn between him and former Workers' Party (WP) MP Yaw Shin Leong.

Mr Palmer had admitted to an improper relationship with a member of the People's Association in Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC.

This admission sparked an online furore.

Mr Palmer became a frequent search term on the Internet. On Twitter, his name has been used as a hashtag for every tweet related to him.

In February, WP expelled its MP for Hougang, Mr Yaw Shin Leong, after he failed to account for his alleged extramarital affairs.

The New Paper spoke to three political observers, who agreed that the People's Action Party handled Mr Palmer's incident professionally.

When rumours of Mr Yaw's alleged indiscretions surfaced, WP remained silent. It was only weeks later that Mr Yaw was expelled.

In Mr Palmer's case, the PAP held a press conference to announce his resignation four days after he told Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Teo Chee Hean about



INDISCRETION: Mr Michael Palmer, seen here with his wife, Diane, announced his resignation as Speaker of the House and MP yesterday. TNP FILE PICTURE

indiscretion is consistent with its stand on Mr Yaw's alleged affairs.

He said: "The PAP has indicated its zero-tolerance stance and the expectations it has of its MPs.

"I think the approach taken by the PAP suggests that it is no less harsh on its own MPs, notwithstanding its measured criticism."

Mr Goh thinks this scandal will affect PAP's credibility.

"It just shows that no party, even the ruling party, with its mechanism in screening candidates, can be 100 per cent sure of the good character of the candidates," he said.

Mr Goh said the "so-called myth" of the PAP's brand name and its ability to come up with decent candidates has been "destroyed".

Prof Tan said: "Given that the party has always prided itself on its selection process, I think people will now probably scrutinise the candidates more closely than before."

But he was quick to add that while party branding is important, most voters will ultimately vote for the individual candidate, not the party.

Dr Wong, however, felt that Mr Palmer's affair would have minimal or no impact on the PAP.

Citing recent sex scandals, like former Central Narcotics Bureau director Ng Boon Gay's case, he said the people are now used to such things.

"They are just going to accept it. I doubt this scandal will affect them more than issues that will make a difference in their daily lives, like bus fares."

On Mr Palmer's resignation in light of his affair, DPM Teo said at the press conference yesterday that MPs are expected to "uphold their moral standards" and "have a duty to the public".

Mr Goh, however, felt that it may be no longer realistic to expect perfect political candidates.

"Adultery is quite common nowadays. Ultimately, the candidates have to come from the same pool of people that we live with in Singapore," said Mr Goh.

"This is something for people to think about, whether we really want perfection of character."

his affair.

Former National Solidarity Party secretary-general Goh Meng Seng compared Mr Yaw's case to Mr Palmer's.

"The way you handle the problem reflects how you are as a person. I think Mr Yaw's way of handling matters was not very responsible," said Mr Goh, who runs a blog called Singapore Alternatives.

At the press conference yesterday, DPM Teo said: "We try and do our best to choose people carefully and most selection systems will be foolproof, and sometimes problems will emerge, even many years after an appointment or selection."

"But I think the important thing to do is when such an event... does occur or arise, we have to act properly and that is the most important thing—to respond in the right manner, openly and de-

side quickly."

Law professor and political commentator Eugene Tan said the PAP has acted "swiftly and resolutely so one can't really fault it on that score".

Mr Goh was impressed by Mr Palmer's decision to come clean.

"He apologised and admitted his mistake. That's the way to do it," he said.

Mistakes

Political observer Dr Wong Wee Nam said: "Everybody can make mistakes. (The PAP) should have been careful when they accused others of making mistakes."

Prof Tan, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament, agreed, saying: "Both parties are going to be wary. No one can take a holier-than-thou attitude now. Everyone will be a lot more cautious."

Prof Tan felt that the PAP's stand on Mr Palmer's

WHAT NOW?

Who will replace Mr Michael Palmer at Punggol East constituency?

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean said he has asked Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State for Trade and Industry and North East District Mayor, to oversee Punggol East constituency, which is a single-seat constituency.

Mr Zainal Sapari will be appointed as the new chairman of Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council.

Who will replace Mr Palmer as Speaker?

Deputy Speaker Charles Chong, who is the Acting Speaker, will continue in this role.

The Prime Minister will nominate a new Speaker for Parliament's consideration when it next meets.

Will there be a by-election for Punggol East SMC?

In a post on his Facebook page yesterday evening, PM Lee Hsien Loong said the Constitution does not require him to call a by-election within any fixed time frame.

He said: "I will carefully consider whether to call a by-election in Punggol East and, if so, when. I assure Singaporeans that I will make my decision based on what is best for the constituents of Punggol East and the country."

When former Hougang MP Yaw Shin Leong was expelled by the Workers' Party (WP) and vacated his seat in February, Hougang resident Vellama Marie Muthu filed an application with the High Court for a mandatory order for PM Lee to call a by-election within three months or within a "reasonable time" deemed by the court.

She withdrew the application after PM Lee called for a by-election to be held on May 26.

WP's Png Eng Huat won the seat against the People's Action Party's Desmond Choo.

SEX SCANDALS IN 2012

THE Chinese character "se" means colour, but it can also mean lust. On Monday, Lianhe Zaobao's readers voted it as the word of the year, among others such as "change", "reproach" and "home". And they may be spot-on.

In the past year, Singapore has seen a number of high-profile scandals:

Sex-for-contracts

WHO: Former CNB director Ng Boon Gay, 46

WHAT: Ng faces four charges of obtaining oral sex from former IT sales manager Cecilia Sue Siew Nang, 36, to further the interest of her companies between June and December last year.

TRIAL: Ms Sue testified in court in September that Ng had forced her to give him oral sex in a car on four occasions.

The defence maintains they were in a consensual relationship. Ng took the stand last month and denied

doing anything wrong.

The trial has been adjourned and oral submissions are scheduled for next month before the court gives its verdict.

WHO: Former Singapore Civil Defence Force commissioner Peter Benedict Lim Sin Pang.

WHAT: Lim, 52, is accused of engaging in sex with Ms Pang Chor Mui, in her 40s, at a carpark at Stadium Walk on May 2, 2010, while she was the general manager of Nimrod Engineering. Nine other charges have been stood down.

TRIAL: Scheduled for next month.

Sex-for-grades

WHO: National University of Singapore (NUS) law professor Tey Tsun Hang, 41

WHAT: Tey allegedly obtained gifts and sexual favours in

exchange for favouring his student, Miss Darinne Ko Wen Hui, 23, in his assessment of her academic performance between May and July 2010. He is also accused of having sexual intercourse with her on two occasions.

TRIAL: Scheduled for Jan 10.

Underage paid sex

WHO: Fifty-one men allegedly paid to have sex with a 17-year-old prostitute. The men included Howard Shaw Chai Li, grandson of the founder of cinema giant Shaw Organisation, and entrepreneur Ban Yin Jheow.

WHAT: The 51 men were charged with having commercial sex with the girl between September 2010 and last October, when she was below 18. She is now 19.

TRIALS: The 11th accused, former Republic of Singapore Navy captain Chan Wei Kiat, 27, was sentenced to 11 weeks' jail in October.

Opposition calls for by-election

WORKERS' PARTY (WP)

In a statement yesterday, the WP noted that Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer had resigned from the People's Action Party.

It said that by virtue of Article 46 of the Constitution, his parliamentary seat of Punggol East Single Member Constituency has become vacant.

For the residents of Punggol East to be properly represented, the WP urged the Prime Minister to call a by-election as soon as possible.

REFORM PARTY (RP)

In a statement yesterday, RP's Secretary-General Kenneth Jeyaretnam urged the PM to call a by-election as soon as possible for Punggol East residents to be represented.

He added that RP is "strongly considering contesting" the seat if and when there is a by-election.

