



**INTERESTED:** Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) chairman Jufrie Mahmood and SDP secretary-general Chee Soon Juan at a press conference yesterday on the party's involvement in a possible by-election in Punggol East SMC.

PICTURE: LIANHE ZAOBAO

## PUNGGOL EAST BY-ELECTION

# Five times the excitement

### *SDP announces its interest in contesting in Punggol East SMC*

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**P**UNGGOL East may face a five-way battle if a by-election is called in the single-seat ward. The Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) is the latest to join in the fray – it announced at a press conference yesterday that it is interested in contesting should a by-election be called.

SDP secretary-general Chee Soon Juan ruled himself out as a possible candidate as he is not eligible to stand.

The Punggol East seat was left vacant after Mr Michael Palmer resigned from the People's Action Party (PAP) on Dec 12 over an extramarital affair.

That very afternoon, the Workers' Party (WP) said it would contest the single seat ward and urged Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to call for fresh polls as soon as possible.

Following that, both the Reform Party (RP) and the Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) quickly staked their claims by visiting the ward.

On Dec 16, SDA secretary-general Desmond Lim spent about four hours walking around the ward.

Political watchers say that while this might be a sign of the country's growing political maturity, it could also

be a way for opposition parties to maintain their presence on the political radar.

Political commentator and Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan said that based on the past General Election, there is a "real possibility" of more than one candidate losing their deposit.

Agreeing, political observer and former Nominated Member of Parliament Siew Kum Hong said: "In the event this happens, Desmond Lim will lose again. He lost the last time round and he's not going to do any better this time round.

"As for the other candidates, WP and SDP will not lose (their deposit), but the Reform Party may. The opposition is just taking each other's votes.

"But in the end, it will probably be a three or four-cornered fight," Mr Siew said.

### **Time for voters to decide**

Voters of Punggol East will vote for the candidate who has the best chance of winning, just as they did in the General Election in May last year, noted Assistant Professor Tan who is a law lecturer at Singapore Management University.

Said Assistant Prof Tan: "In WP's case, voters felt that its candidate Lee Li Lian had a better chance and that's why Desmond Lim (from SDA) lost convincingly.

"I think it will eventually be a three-cornered fight, even so it will be a two-horse race between PAP and WP," he said.

In last year's General Election, there was a three-way fight at the constituency.

WP candidate Lee got 41 per cent of the vote, while Mr Palmer won with 54.5 per cent. SDA's Mr Lim got 4.5 per cent and lost his deposit.