

ANALYSTS SAY PARTY IS RESPONDING TO PAP'S MOVE TO EXPOSE POSSIBLE CANDIDATES EARLY

WP potential candidates make appearance at public event

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SINGAPORE—A former civil servant who became a corporate high-flyer has reportedly joined the ranks of the Workers' Party (WP).

In what some analysts have de-

scribed as a tit-for-tat response to the tactics of the People's Action Party (PAP), Mr Leon Perera was out and about in WP colours under the full glare of the media last Sunday.

Mr Perera, 44, who is chief executive of Spire Research and Consulting, was among party volunteers and

members handing out food rations and daily necessities to elderly residents in the Paya Lebar division.

Chinese daily Lianhe Zaobao identified Mr Perera and Mr Firuz Khan, 48, who works in the banking and retail industry, as the opposition party's potential candidates for the next Gen-



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Associate Professor Eugene Tan
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eral Election due by January 2017.

In recent weeks, the PAP has exposed to the public eye its potential candidates for the next GE — a move analysts felt was a significant departure from its practice of keeping its cards close to the chest as far as the identities of potential candidates were concerned. Analysts noted that the party had learnt from the 2011 GE that voters need time to familiarise themselves with new candidates.

Unlike Mr Khan, who has been with the WP for several years and was on the council of its youth wing in 2007, Mr Perera is a new face in the WP's ranks. When contacted, Mr Perera declined to comment. The WP was also tight-lipped about his involvement.

A former assistant head of the Economic Development Board's Enterprise Development Division, Mr Perera graduated from Oxford University with double first-class honours. He is also an adviser for The Independent news website and vice-president on the board of the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics. Last Sunday, Mr Perera was photographed by Lianhe Zaobao beside WP's Aljunied GRC Member of Parliament (MP) Chen Show Mao.

Political analysts previously noted that the PAP was taking a leaf out of the WP's book by having potential candidates work the ground early. Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said the opposition party is now, in turn, responding to the PAP as well.

"The WP realises that they need to also demonstrate a sense of urgency and informally introduce their potential candidates early," said Associate Professor Tan, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP). Agreeing, former NMP Siew Kum Hong said the WP was "following PAP's playbook".

Assoc Prof Tan, who was Mr Perera's classmate in junior college, said he was not surprised to learn of the latter's political involvement. Adding that it was a natural transition for Mr Perera as an activist, he said: "Leon has always been politically conscious and has very strong ideas about government and politics in Singapore."

So far, five potential PAP candidates have been identified. Most recently, corporate lawyer Amrin Amin, 35, was described last Saturday to reporters by Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Education and Manpower) Hawazi Daipi — who is also an MP for Sembawang GRC — as "someone who has the potential to be a candidate".

Mr Perera is the latest in the line of former civil servants who have joined the opposition. Others include husband-and-wife pair Tony Tan and Hazel Poa, who are with the National Solidarity Party.

Mr Siew said: "It's just a natural state of things as politics in Singapore normalises. You are going to see good candidates going to both sides."