

Punggol East by-election on 26 Jan

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SINGAPORE: A by-election will be held for Punggol East Single-Member Constituency (SMC), after Member of Parliament Michael Palmer resigned over an extra-marital affair.

Nomination Day will be held on 16 January 2013. If more than one candidate stand for nominations on Nomination Day, Polling Day will be held on 26 January 2013. Polling Day will not be a public holiday.

The president issued the Writ of Election on Wednesday.

The Nomination Place is North Vista Secondary School at Rivervale Link.

The Returning Officer is Mr Yam Ah Mee, chief executive director of the People's Association.

In the previous election in 2011, the Workers' Party (WP) fielded Lee Li Lian, and Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) fielded Desmond Lim.

WP garnered about 41 per cent of valid votes and SDA received 4.5 per cent of valid votes in the three-cornered fight.

Based on the Register of Electors, there are about 31,495 voters in Punggol East.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he had decided to hold a by-election in Punggol East to give the residents their own Member of Parliament, before Singapore focuses back on national issues.

In a statement, he said: "We have a busy national agenda this year. The White Paper on Population will soon be debated in Parliament. Budget 2013 is around the corner. The Our Singapore Conversation is translating the views of citizens into programmes to improve our lives."

Mr Lee hopes Punggol East residents will vote for the candidate who can best represent them in Parliament, solve their problems and improve their lives.

He said Minister of State and Mayor Teo Ser Luck has been overseeing the constituency, while Mr Zainal Sapari has been chairing the Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council.

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean has also taken a personal interest in the residents' welfare.

Political analyst Zulkifli Baharudin commented: "I'm not surprised with the decision. A by-election has to be called, and I think in this particular instance I don't think the prime minister wants to be accused of hampering opposition's ambition (of wanting 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 said the decision could come across as counter-intuitive.

He said: "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 PAP to field a new candidate.

Mr Zulkifli said: "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."

Several opposition parties have earlier indicated their interest in the election.

Prof Tan commented: "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."