

Speaker quits over affair

BY REICO WONG

The People's Action Party (PAP) first came to know about Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer's extramarital affair last Saturday night when he himself informed Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean about the matter and that he would resign from his positions in politics. The next morning, Mr Palmer met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who agreed that the proper thing to do

was for Mr Palmer, who is the Member of Parliament for Punggol East Single Member Constituency (SMC), to admit his mistake openly and take responsibility by stepping down.

"We took the last two days to make the arrangements to ensure that residents of Punggol East (constituency) continue to be taken care of, and that the transition is carried out according to the proper legal and administrative procedures," said Mr Teo at a press conference held early yesterday afternoon.

"On behalf of the party and of myself, I would like to say to the residents of Punggol East: 'I am very sorry that we have let you down. I assure you that we will put things right and continue to look after you.'"

This was the shocking revelation made to reporters at the press conference held at the PAP headquarters in New Upper Changi Road.

The sombre atmosphere which filled the small room grew heavier as Mr Palmer, 44, shed light that it was a staff member of the People's

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Association (PA) branch at Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC that he had an affair with.

He provided little detail of who the woman was, instead saying that he resigned to take responsibility for a "grave mistake" he made. Wearing a severe frown, he added that his conduct

was "improper" and that he had made "a serious error of judgment".

"While the individual did not work with me directly, Punggol East used to be part of the GRC and continues to work with it. My conduct was improper," said Mr Palmer. "I have resigned in order to avoid further embarrassment to the PAP and Parliament."

The PA said in a statement last evening that the constituency director of its Pasir Ris West Constituency Office, Ms Laura Ong, resigned from her position on Monday. She had cited family commitments as her reason for leaving.

My Paper understands that Ms Ong is the woman whom Mr Palmer had an affair with.

Apologising "unreservedly" to the residents in his constituency, colleagues and his own family, Mr Palmer added that he had performed his professional duties to the best of his abilities and that his actions did not affect how he carried out his

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'My conduct was improper and a serious error of judgment'

MR MICHAEL Palmer yesterday addressed reporters at the People's Action Party's headquarters. The following is his statement in full:

L Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for attending this press conference.

With great regret, I announce that I have tendered my resignation as a Member of Parliament and as a member of the People's Action Party.

I have resigned to take full responsibility for a grave mistake that I have committed. I had a relationship with a member of the People's Association staff working in Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC.

While the individual did not work with me directly, Punggol East used to be part of the GRC and continues to work with it. My conduct was improper and it was a serious error of judgment.

I have resigned in order to avoid further embarrassment to the PAP and to Parliament.

I have performed my duties as Speaker of Parliament and MP for Punggol East to the best of my ability and my actions did not affect my performance of those duties.

I am deeply sorry for letting down the residents of Punggol East, the PAP and everyone who has believed in me and supported me. I apologise unreservedly to them, and to my family.

May I humbly request that you be kind enough to respect my family's privacy during this difficult period?

Thank you.

DPM: No selection system foolproof

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duties. Mr Teo said that in the interim, the Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Mayor of the North East District, Mr Teo Ser Luck, will oversee Punggol East constituency.

MP Zainal Sapari will be appointed as the new chairman of Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council, while Deputy Speaker of Parliament Charles Chong will serve as Acting Speaker until Mr Lee nominates a new Speaker when Parliament meets on Jan 14.

In a letter yesterday to Mr Palmer, Mr Lee said that it is with

"great sadness" that he accepted his resignation and apologies.

He added that it is necessary that all PAP MPs and Advisers to Grassroots Organisations "uphold highest standards of personal conduct" and for "the party to be seen to hold them to these standards".

Mr Teo Chee Hean also said that while the PAP does its best to choose its representatives carefully, no selection system is foolproof. He said: "Sometimes, problems may emerge many years after an appointment or selection is made. The important thing to do when such an episode

arises is that we act properly."

Assistant Professor Eugene Tan of the Singapore Management University's law faculty said that the PAP moved swiftly to address the matter, unlike a similar incident involving the Workers' Party's Yaw Shin Leong, who vacated his seat in Hougang in February.

Dr Tan, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament, said: "Mr Yaw's expulsion from WP was more because he was non-cooperative with the inquiry. WP did not come out to state clearly enough that they would not tolerate such conduct."

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