Would she have done better at an SMC?

SHE came, they saw, she conquered.
Hearts, that is.

But not enough votes to beat the heavyweight PAP team at Aljunied, the hottest of the hot wards.

Like a breath of fresh air to the local political scene, Workers’ Party chairman Sylvia Lim, 41, attracted curious crowds at rallies.

This was her maiden election campaign and observers agreed that she put up a good show in mixing with people at grassroot level and trading barbs with her political opponents.

But in the end, it was not good enough to clinch the GRC. The Temasek Polytechnic law lecturer and her WP team got 43.9 per cent of votes.

The PAP team, led by Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo, garnered 56.1 per cent.

Still, she might now enter Parliament as a Non-constituency MP, a seat that can be offered to the best loser.

But could it have been a different outcome for Ms Lim?

Said Mr Eugene Tan, assistant law professor at Singapore Management University: “I think so. Given her strengths, charisma and abilities, she could have stood on her own and put up a good showing.

“We need to gun for a bigger prize (the GRC) in Aljunied, one of the not-so-strong PAP wards.

“Besides, the WP and Sylvia have been working the ground there for several years now.”

When asked if she could have done better contesting alone in an SMC, Ms Lim told reporters: “It’s very hard to say. Looking at the past results in the SMCs, what does it tell you?”

SOMETHING TO DECIDE

As for the NCMP position, she said, it was “something for her and WP to decide”.

Based on past poll results since 1991, all winning candidates of single-seat wards have been Chinese males — except for Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Soon who won Yuhua SMC in the 1991 GE.

In that same GE, Dr Seet Ai Mee, then Acting Minister for Community Development, lost her Bukit Gombak single-seat ward by a narrow 654 votes to Singapore Democratic Party chairman Ling How Doong.

In the 2001 GE, it marked the start of a unique trend when all nine single-member constituencies were contested by Chinese male candidates from all opposition parties.

The trend has continued in this GE.

Former Nominated MP Mr Zulkifli Baharudin said this trend has continued because the parties are wary of taking risks, having considered past poll results.

He said: “Nobody wants to lose. Election is not the time to test such things.”

Mr Tan said it is an unhealthy phenomenon which should be reversed as soon as possible.

“It seems to suggest that in meritocratic and multiracial Singapore, our electoral behaviour is along racial and gender lines,” he said.

“PAP has to take the lead in reversing this unhealthy trend where minorities and women are supposedly disadvantaged in electoral contests.”

Mr Zulkifli added: “For Singapore’s interests, I hope we’ll cross that divide soon.”

The political observers are more optimistic of a woman candidate than a minority candidate reversing the trend now.

Mr Tan and Mr Zulkifli pointed out PAP’S Halimah Yacob and WP’s Sylvia Lim as possible candidates.

Mr Zulkifli said: “Well, if she (Ms Lim) continues what she is doing now, if her exposure continues beyond this elections, why not?”

Sylvia Lim: MS NCMP?