GE: WP's leadership renewal "on track"

By Saifulbahri Ismail | Posted: 23 April 2011 0030 hrs

SINGAPORE: Secretary-General of the Workers' Party Low Thia Khiang said leadership renewal in the party is "on track".

Speaking to Channel NewsAsia, Mr Low said he expects to assemble a stronger team after this election.

He said the first phase of Workers' Party's leadership succession, which was to renew the party's executive council, has been completed.

It is now renewing its top leadership including the posts of chairman and secretary-general.

The party added that process is now half complete.

Thirty-four-year-old former civil servant Gerald Giam used to think the only way to improve the lives of Singaporeans was through the PAP.

Mr Giam worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a political officer and even served many years as a youth leader in South West Community Development Council.

However, it was his time in the civil service that he said made him realise the country needs a stronger opposition to ensure better governance for future generations.

In 2009, Gerald joined the Workers' Party.

In the two years, he said he has learnt a lot and is now a member of the executive council.

"There's no short cut to leadership in our party," Mr Giam said.

"I'm selling Hammer (the party's logo) on Sundays, doing house visits and meeting with residents. It was a daunting task, at first, for me.

"But it's something I've really grown to enjoy. I've learnt how different groups of Singaporeans think.

"I've also been involved in revising the manifesto. That entailed a lot of discussion and it helps us to see this is what it's like if in future we are in government."

In a display of the party's efforts at self-renewal, Mr Giam represented the party during a political debate broadcast on Channel NewsAsia, while better-known leaders of the Workers' Party took a backseat.
The party is hoping to build on the momentum of the forthcoming election.

Worker's Party Secretary-General Low Thia Khiang said: "If we are successful in breaking through a GRC (Group Representation Constituency), ... I would expect more people (with calibre) to come forward and thereby, I think we would have even a better team.

"There are some potential (people) here and there within the leadership team who can take over the party leadership in time to come.

"And one day, I'm sure someone within the party will get the support of the team and the party to become the new Secretary-General."

Opposition parties say the road to leadership renewal for them is fraught with challenges.

National Solidarity Party Secretary-General Goh Meng Seng said: "We have a tougher job.

"We do not have the structure, the network like what PAP (People's Action Party) has - GLCs (Government Linked Companies), government services, the PAs (People's Association) and unions.

"We have our own network, business network, grassroots network. Whenever we walk around, people will see us and get interested and the connection will be there.

"But we have to spend a lot of time to do follow-ups with these people."

Political analysts say this election will decide the pace of leadership renewal in the opposition.

Political analyst Eugene Tan said: "If the opposition does well, they are more likely to be able to attract new members.

"If you look at most of the opposition party leaders, they are well into their 50s.

"I think a lot would depend how the opposition parties do in this election. In four to five years' time, we should see a generational change in the leading opposition parties".

-CNA/wk