



Mr Pritam Singh, 34, feels there ought to be more information for the public to scrutinise when policies are introduced or changed. He cited as an example the Government's decision to let in more foreigners after 2006 and the lack of information and debate on the move. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Postgraduate law student is potential WP candidate

By ZAKIR HUSSAIN

THE Workers' Party (WP) has a potential new candidate in postgraduate law student Pritam Singh and he is keen to champion what he describes as more rigorous law-making in Singapore.

In an interview with The Straits Times during which he revealed that he is likely to contest the elections, he said that while Singapore's executive and judiciary are First World, its legislature is lagging behind: "We have a very good and trust-worthy judicial system... and there's confidence in that pillar of Government."

"We need institutions that reflect the demands of Singaporeans. Let's move towards a First World Parliament."

For a start, he said, there ought to be more information for the public to scrutinise when government policies are introduced or changed.

He cited as an example the Government's decision to let in more foreigners after 2006 and the lack of information and debate on the move.

The WP's previous manifesto, he noted, had called for a freedom of information law to require public agencies to disclose government information.

"Until that comes along, the PAP (People's Action Party) would be better served by being more accountable and transparent," he added.

Mr Singh is among what is expected to be a bumper crop of more than 20 WP candidates, many with tertiary education, who will be fielded in the upcoming polls. The WP fielded 20 candidates in 2006.

Mr Singh, 34, writes about policies and socio-political issues on his blog, Singapore 2025, which he hopes gets citizens thinking about the future they want.

While the WP continues to be tight-lipped about its candidates, the party leadership gave Mr Singh permission to be interviewed.

On why he joined the opposition, he said he was prompted by his desire to bring about more rigorous debate on the laws being passed in Singapore, to force a more accountable process.

"The level-headedness and leadership qualities exhibited by senior leaders of the WP was a decisive factor in my decision to join the party," he added.

He has a training contract with a local law firm and plans to sit for the bar exami-

nation to qualify to be a lawyer. He studied history and political science at the National University of Singapore, before he received the Chevening and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Iseas) scholarships to do a master's in war studies at King's College in London.

He was a research associate at Iseas from 2004 to 2007, and obtained a diploma in Islamic studies from the International Islamic University in Malaysia.

He founded Opinion Asia, a commentary syndicate focusing on Asian issues, in 2006, and in 2009 enrolled in the Singapore Management University's Juris Doctor programme which gives mid-career professionals the chance to do a law degree. Mr Singh, who is single, lives with his lawyer father, housewife mother and his elder sister in a terrace house in Jurong.

He was elected to the executive committee of the WP youth wing in August.

Asked about criticism by some opposition members that the WP was not forceful enough and seemed happy not to be too far away from the PAP line, he said: "If Singaporeans think we are too close to the PAP, I would recommend they look at the speeches secretary-general Low Thia Kiang and chairman Sylvia Lim have made in Parliament."

Mr Low has been MP for Hougang since 1991 and Ms Lim is a Non-Constituency MP who led the WP team in Aljunied GRC in the 2006 polls.

Mr Singh added: "We have to play by the rules the PAP has set until we get into Parliament and convince the PAP to change or modify the system and certain policies Singaporeans disagree with."

Among the issues close to his heart is the educational performance of minority students and its effect on Singapore's multi-racial bonds.

Singaporeans, he said, expect good, strong candidates from the opposition and from the PAP, but the latter has a much broader choice of individuals.

"In the opposition, we don't have many people coming forward compared to the PAP... and if a party can attract strong candidates who can connect with average Singaporeans, maybe they are the ones you want to consider voting for."

"We are determined that ours are candidates the WP and Singaporeans can be proud of," he added.