



Mr Chen Show Mao taking questions from journalists as he was formally presented by the WP yesterday. The globetrotting corporate lawyer, who has pledged to return to Singapore for good with his family even if he does not get elected, said that he has been playing the role of "an ambassador for our country" abroad, just as other overseas Singaporeans do. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Chen: I never stopped being a Singaporean

WP star candidate says he has always kept abreast of issues at home

By KOR KIAN BENG

GLOBETROTTING corporate lawyer Chen Show Mao stressed yesterday that he is able to represent Singaporeans and identify with their aspirations, and that he will make a good MP if he is elected at the upcoming polls.

Despite being away from Singapore for nearly 30 years due to studies and work, the Beijing-based 50-year-old shared that he has lived in Housing Board flats, has a local address, and even has a POSB account to receive government payouts.

"So I spent all this time abroad but that doesn't mean I've stopped being Singaporean," said the Workers' Party (WP) star candidate, who was formally unveiled yesterday.

Mr Chen, who was Singapore's top A-level student in 1979, did his national service despite being a Taiwan-born teenager who did not have Singapore citizenship at the time. He said that over the years, he has kept in touch with key events and issues here.

Besides gatherings of overseas Singaporeans, making trips back home and hosting visiting Singaporeans, Mr Chen said: "It's through the Internet. It's through publications such as The Straits Times, which may be a few days old but we can still have access to (when) overseas."

To illustrate that he would not have problems helping residents, he referred to the letter he received from the authorities on his payout from the Grow and Share package, an initiative in this year's Budget to help Singaporeans cope with rising costs.

He ticked off the items listed, from the Medisave top-ups to utility rebates, explaining that he knows how to advise residents who have questions about these government policies and initiatives.

"So I don't think I will be lost. I think I will be a good MP," said the top lawyer, who has been involved in the world's largest initial public offering (IPO) deal.

Much has been said about Mr Chen since The Straits Times broke the news last month that he was a potential WP candidate.

The People's Action Party's (PAP) big guns, such as Education Minister Ng Eng

Hen and Foreign Minister George Yeo, have questioned his ability to connect with voters, and whether he would understand the issues and challenges Singapore has faced in the 30 years he has been away.

But Mr Chen, who moved here from Taiwan with his family when he was 11, said that while abroad, he has been playing the role of "an ambassador for our country", just as other overseas Singaporeans do.

He left Singapore in 1982 for studies at top universities Harvard, Oxford and Stanford. Since 1992, he has been based in New York, Hong Kong and Beijing.

He has pledged to return to Singapore for good with his wife and two children, regardless of whether he wins or loses in the May 7 General Election.

His party chief Low Thia Khiang said yesterday that it was unfair for the PAP to suggest that Mr Chen should have spent more time here before standing for election. Unlike the PAP, the WP is unable to offer overseas-based candidates jobs here.

Said Mr Low: "What's important to us is whether the candidate knows enough about Singapore and has the connection with residents. And even if you're based here, it doesn't mean you would understand the policies, right?"

Besides Mr Chen, the WP also unveiled three candidates: educational entrepreneur Yee Jenn Jong, 46; Singapore Management University postgraduate law student Pritam Singh, 34; and Hong Kong-based entrepreneur and money broker Glenda Han, 35.

All are newcomers except Ms Han, who contested the 2006 polls on the WP's "suicide squad" in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's Ang Mo Kio GRC.

Mr Singh - the WP's first Sikh candidate, said Mr Low - joined the party last year to help build a credible opposition presence in Parliament that "makes sure the PAP is acting in national interests".

It is an aim shared by Mr Chen, who also listed other topics, such as ministerial salaries, electoral boundary changes, and the immigration policy, that are close to his heart. He will be speaking on these topics during the election campaign.

"This election is not about me only. It's about us. It's about our future. It's about the direction in which we would like Singapore to go. And here I am, imperfect as I am, I offer myself to you so that you have a choice, you have a say in your future," he said.

Chen hopes his son will choose to do NS

WORKERS' Party (WP) candidate Chen Show Mao hopes his 11-year-old son will do national service, even though the boy can choose not to when he comes of age.

Mr Chen's wife is a United States citizen, so their children - their son and their seven-year-old daughter - who are Singapore citizens have the option of choosing US citizenship.

Mr Chen said he would let his son make the decision on NS on his own, but added: "I would certainly hope that he would decide to do what I did."

Taiwan-born Mr Chen was referring to how he voluntarily underwent NS after he finished his A levels in 1979, even though he became a Singaporean only in 1986. He was a platoon commander and brigade staff officer in the army.

He also revealed more about his family. His wife, a former accountant,

was born in Taiwan and raised in Indonesia, before emigrating to the US with her family. Like Mr Chen, she went to school there and in Britain.

They had three children, but their second child, a girl, died of an illness just before she turned four in 2006.

His wife is now a housewife in Beijing, but will be moving back here with their two children.

Mr Chen said his wife and parents were concerned when he told them about his intention to enter politics.

"My parents, for example, don't quite understand why it makes sense to not continue the path that I'm on in terms of professional development," he said.

"I think you can understand why. We feel that we're happy with what we have and people are naturally resistant to prospective changes."

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