

PAP takes fight online

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PM Lee cites use of blogs and social-media sites to help party better connect with the public

The People's Action Party (PAP) is gearing up for battle with opposition parties online.

Responding to a question at the PAP Party Convention yesterday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that the Internet is open for everyone to use and if the PAP is not using it, then the opposition will.

"We have to make sure we put our message out and have our people participate in the new media, to put across materials in ways which will make sense on the Internet," said Mr Lee. He cited the use of online avenues like blogs, YouTube and social-networking sites – like Facebook and Twitter – as alternatives to send PAP messages, as opposed to posting a long 5,000-word speech online that "nobody will read".

Mr Teo Ser Luck, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development, Youth and Sports, told my paper that the PAP is trying win Singaporeans' trust and support by tackling perceptions of the party generated in the real world and also, increasingly, online. He said that before and during a general election, new-media platforms can quickly sway the views of people.

"I think that's where the most intensive fights will be. And the little battles are being fought right now in cyberspace. And that's exactly why there's a lot of urgency (to use) new media," said Mr Teo.

Political observer Gillian Koh said that the PAP has traditionally chosen to use the mainstream media – which is seen as more credible – and parliamentary sittings to address online concerns.

The senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies noted that opposition parties have been using the Internet to spread their political messages for a while.

In the last 2006 election, even though the PAP had put restrictions on online political campaigning, the public still voiced its views on the Internet, she said.

So, the PAP's moves into new media have been "a long time coming", she said.

"With the Internet, there's a greater demand on the PAP for accountability and transparency," she added.

The party's members need to be empowered to respond to debates on national issues systematically on the Internet, and not just have a few members do so sporadically, said Dr Koh.

"People will want the PAP to reply directly to them online," she said.