

PAP cadres to elect central executive committee tomorrow

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Close to 2,000 People's Action Party (PAP) cadres will elect members of the party's central executive committee (CEC), its highest decision-making body, tomorrow.

Observers say the results of this biennial voting process are likely to reinforce the make-up of the party's leadership team ahead of the next general election, which must be called by January 2017.

Cadres will pick 12 CEC members from a shortlist. Two years ago, the shortlist had 19 names.

Another six more, at most, can be co-opted to form an 18-member committee.

Cadres are trusted party stalwarts, whose only distinction from ordinary party members is being able to elect and be elected to the CEC.

The election takes place during the party conference which is attended only by cadres, and following it is a rally that is open to all party members.

In the 2012 round of voting, two first-term ministers - Education Minister Heng Swee Keat and Social and Family Development Minister Chan Chun Sing - were among the 12 leaders elected.

Their contemporaries, then acting ministers Tan Chuan-Jin, who got the 13th-highest number of votes, and Lawrence Wong, were co-opted. All four, inducted for the 2011 General Election, are widely tipped to be among the key members of the PAP's fourth-generation leadership.

"We shouldn't be surprised if we see more new faces, particularly those from the next generation of possible leaders," said law professor and former Nominated MP Eugene Tan.

"More of the younger ministers might be co-opted," he added, without elaborating.

But it might still be too early to identify the party's future secretary-general - and, possibly, the country's next prime minister, analysts say.

"That picture will be clearer only as the younger generation of leaders build up a longer track record and when we draw nearer to 2020, which is when the current PM has indicated he might stand down," said Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has previously indicated that such a transition may take place when he is around 65 years old. He is 62 this year.

Several cadre members interviewed by The Straits Times said they do not expect significant changes to the line-up tomorrow, especially since changes were made after the 2011 General Election, which saw the loss of a GRC for the first time.

That year, six older-generation leaders - including Mr Lee Kuan Yew and Mr Goh Chok Tong - left the CEC.

Tomorrow, the cadres are also set to approve changes to the PAP Constitution, to reflect its refreshed emphasis on an "open and compassionate meritocracy".

The rally will have speakers from the party's Women's Wing, Seniors Group, Young PAP and PAP Policy Forum.

PM Lee, its secretary-general, will give a key address.