

PAP likely to unveil election manifesto tomorrow

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The youth wing of the People's Action Party (PAP) celebrates its 25th anniversary tomorrow, an occasion when the PAP is likely to unveil its manifesto for the general election.

The widely-anticipated document, reportedly dwelling on 'the future Singaporeans want', is expected to be one topic in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's speech at the Young PAP (YP) event.

Mr Lee is the secretary-general of the party.

Another key issue the PM will likely dwell on is leadership renewal for the party and for the country.

The 24 new candidates being fielded by the PAP will make their appearance before the gathering; some will deliver speeches, say party sources.

They also say that the manifesto will contain election promises on 'keeping Singaporeans together'.

Hot-button issues such as the influx of foreigners over the last few years and the income gap will feature in it.

Written by a committee of PAP MPs spearheaded by Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, its launch will flag off the PAP's campaign for General Election 2011.

In the last polls in 2006, the PAP's manifesto - titled 'Staying Together, Moving Ahead' - also made its debut at a YP anniversary event.

Then, it was the youth wing's 20th anniversary, and the manifesto was announced amid drumrolls, showers of confetti and balloons in the party colours of red, white and blue.

Five days later, Parliament was dissolved and the writ of election issued.

A similarly festive, 'rally-like' atmosphere is expected at tomorrow's event, to be held at the NTUC Centre.

It will be attended by almost all the Cabinet ministers, as well as the 84 branch secretaries who spearhead the PAP's work on the ground in each constituency.

In addition to PM Lee, YP chairman Teo Ser Luck and the chairman of the event's organising committee, Mr Abner Koh, will also address the crowd.

The Straits Times understands that other speakers, including a number of prominent new candidates introduced in the last few weeks by the PAP, will deliver 'rally-style' speeches.

According to Mr Koh, 28, who is also the deputy organising secretary of the YP's executive committee, activists in the youth wing will also deliver a 'youthful' performance to pump up the crowd.

There will also be a video charting the YP's evolution over the last 25 years, including the five chairmen it has had - PM Lee, Foreign Minister George Yeo, labour chief Lim Swee Say, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan, and Mr Teo.

Despite the fanfare planned for the manifesto's unveiling however, political watchers do not expect ground-breaking features.

The 2006 manifesto, they noted, was mostly a compilation of policies the Government had announced and started work on, such as giving more help to the elderly and revamping the education system.

In the past two years, there has been much soul-searching on Singapore's reliance on cheap foreign labour, the income gap, and more aid for the bottom 20 per cent of Singaporeans.

Accordingly, Institute of Policy Studies senior fellow Gillian Koh noted, the goals of inclusive growth and boosting median incomes by 30 per cent in 10 years have been widely publicised.

'The PAP is consistent and predictable and that is its selling point,' she said. 'They're telling voters, this is Business, with a capital 'B', as usual.'