

## **Time is ripe for PAP to unveil new faces**

### **Some MPs expect media debut of new candidates to begin any day now**

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The time is ripe for the ruling party to start introducing its new candidates, several People's Action Party (PAP) Members of Parliament said this week.

They expect the media conferences at which new faces are unveiled at the party's Changi headquarters to begin any day.

In 2006, the first batch of PAP new faces were presented on March 23, six weeks before Polling Day on May 6.

Based on that timeline, Tampines GRC MP Masagos Zulkifli said: 'The introductions could take place very soon.'

Hong Kah GRC MP Zaquy Mohamad, who was in the first batch of new faces introduced in 2006, pointed to recent events such as Parliament's passing of the 2011 Budget last week, and the PAP's logistical briefing for its election rally organisers on Wednesday.

'The groundwork is in place, the forces are gathering,' he said.

In 2006, the PAP introduced its candidates between March 23 and April 13, then unveiled its manifesto at its youth wing's 20th anniversary celebrations on April 15 that year.

This time round, the Young PAP will celebrate its anniversary on April 17.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong could choose to unveil the party's manifesto then, and wait a few days before dissolving Parliament and announcing the dates of the election campaign and Polling Day, as he did in 2006.

The imminent introduction of PAP's new faces provides fresh fuel to speculations that the general election (GE) will take place sooner rather than later.

One factor is the ongoing nuclear crisis in Japan, said political analyst Derek da Cunha. He pointed to the 'precedent' of the snap election in 2001, which was called two months after the Sept 11 attacks cast a pall of uncertainty over the global outlook.

'If they introduce three or four candidates say, on Monday, and another batch on Wednesday, they are moving quickly,' Dr da Cunha said.

**But Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said the crisis in Japan was not on the same scale as the terror attacks of Sept 11.**

**'While it is a huge humanitarian disaster that is still unfolding, I don't think it has the kind of financial impact that would have resonance in Singapore and certainly, our political leaders did not portray it to be so,' she said.**

Still, former Nominated MP Zulkifli Baharudin thinks the ruling party will move 'faster than what most people think' once it begins introducing its new candidates.

'The opposition might want to make a big thing out of it but it is not in the Government's interest to drag the election out for too long. The PAP wants to make the elections an orderly procession and a time for renewal. Their policies are already very clear,' he said.

The PAP has in recent GEs brought in 20 to 25 new candidates each time. So far, The Straits Times has picked out 24 potential new faces for this round.

Among them are Temasek Holdings' in-house counsel Desmond Lee, 34, formerly from the Law Ministry; Chief of Army Chan Chun Sing, 41, who retires from the Singapore Armed Forces on Thursday; and National Trades Union Congress assistant secretary-general Ong Ye Kung, 41.

Meanwhile, potential candidates contacted said they are mentally prepared for their media debut.

NTUC youth development unit deputy director Desmond Choo, 32, said: 'I will take some time to consolidate my thoughts but this is not something you can cram for. People will see through nice statements if you don't do your job on the ground,' he said.

Incumbent MPs interviewed remember the short notice they were given - any time between two and five days. They then had to rush for a medical check-up and a photo-taking session.

Marine Parade GRC MP Seah Kian Peng recalls that even as the first introductions were taking place, PAP leaders were still interviewing yet more potential new faces.

As for Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Community Development, Youth and Sports and Transport) Teo Ser Luck, the first thing he did was to take out his old Victoria School uniform, as he needed an all-white outfit for the media conference.

The most important thing, though, he said, was to 'just be yourself'.