

First time PAP has raised spectre of not forming govt: Analyst

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Commenting on the fact that a General Election (GE) here has been framed by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) for the first time as a fight to form the next government, political analysts said it was probably an attempt by the party's secretary-general Lee Hsien Loong to focus voters' minds.

The argument that Singapore should have an opposition in Parliament — as a check and balance against the PAP — is a compelling one, said Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

"I think it's a way in which Mr Lee is trying to persuade people not to think of the contest as one of only checking the Government," she said.

"This is the first time where the articulation of the PAP perhaps not forming the Government is put forth," noted former Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Eugene Tan, who felt the next GE would be watershed as there would be a clearer indication of whether Singapore is moving towards a two-party political system, demonstrated by the Opposition gaining more seats.

This is because, in all previous elections, the PAP was successful in ensuring the Opposition did not build on electoral gains in terms of their number of parliamentary seats.

Despite Mr Lee's characterisation of the next GE as a "deadly serious fight" that will be about who forms the Government, political analysts told TODAY it is unlikely Singapore's ruling party since 1965 will lose its parliamentary majority in the next contest.

If the Opposition — in particular the Workers' Party (WP), which has seven elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and two Non-Constituency MPs — continues to make gains in the next GE, the prospect — albeit unlikely — of the PAP losing its majority in the subsequent GE could arise, said former NMP Siew Kum Hong.

On Mr Lee signalling the intent to fight to win in every constituency, including those held by the WP, political observers felt recapturing the opposition wards could be an uphill battle. Mr Siew said it is likely the PAP would seek to defend its seats strategically to shore up support, instead of aggressively targeting the WP's wards.

Assoc Prof Tan did not think the majority of people in those wards have lost faith in the WP. Hence, the PAP also faces a dilemma in calibrating the right balance in teams to field in opposition wards, he added.

As the prospect of the Opposition forming the government increases, Singaporeans' voting patterns would change, said Mr Siew. "The desire to vote to signal displeasure with the PAP or to have a check in Parliament will almost certainly decrease, which would force the Opposition to more clearly articulate their plans and policies."