

No decision on GE date yet, says PM Lee

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Just days after Foreign Minister George Yeo said he expected the Government to call for polls before the Presidential Election, another Minister has weighed in on the issue.

Yesterday, at a community event in Marine Parade, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong told reporters that his personal preference coincided with Mr Yeo's prediction.

Said Mr Goh: "My own thoughts ... if PM seeks my view, is to hold (the General Election) before the Presidential Election. Get the issues out of the way and leave the presidential election without issues."

Earlier, at a People's Action Party Women Wing's event on Saturday, Mr Goh had also noted that the timing of the GE in relation to the Presidential Election was a "key consideration" for Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Both Mr Yeo and Mr Goh made it clear that the decision was down to one man: the Prime Minister.

And political pundits were none the wiser after Mr Lee said yesterday that the Government has not decided on the GE date.

Speaking at the sidelines of a community event in Teck Ghee, Mr Lee said: "We haven't decided yet. It's not likely to be on the same day as the Presidential Election. But other than that, there are many possibilities."

Mr Lee added that he has yet to receive the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee report.

The GE is due by February next year.

The opposition had, in the past, taken issue with the lack of early notice about the timing of the polls.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noted that the uncertainty over the GE timing would keep the opposition parties "on their toes".

But she pointed out: "Since February 2009 (when the registers of electors were updated for the first time since the 2006 GE), pundits and I'm sure opposition politicians have been on notice about the next election."

Dr Koh added that the Government could still be gauging the public sentiment on issues such as the mother tongue curriculum and land acquisition over the North-South expressway. Moreover, Mr Goh had revealed on Saturday that the PAP was still finalising its line-up of new candidates, said Dr Koh.

Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan noted that the ruling party's ability to reserve the element of surprise would disadvantage the opposition parties, given how the group – given their limited resources – generally intensify their efforts nearer elections. But Asst Prof Tan said: "You may have Singaporeans feeling, 'let's play it fair and square.'"

Opposition figures who MediaCorp spoke to did not seem perturbed by the uncertainty over the timing of the GE.

National Solidarity Party (NSP) secretary-general Goh Meng Seng said: "We prepared for elections to be held in December last year, so it doesn't make a difference to us."

Socialist Front secretary-general Chia Ti Lik noted that the later the PAP calls for elections, the more time all parties would have to prepare for it. Which is why he believed the PAP could spring a surprise on the opposition by holding the elections sooner rather than later.

Yesterday, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong also noted that the mood on the ground is "getting more optimistic" with a healthy economy and with people knowing that the Government has taken actions to deal with problems such as the influx of foreigners and overcrowding.

With the timing of GE still up in the air, the Senior Minister was certain about one thing though: When asked by reporters if he would run for the presidency, his answer was a clear "no" and that he would continue to contest in Marine Parade GRC.