

Five Years: The 13th Parliament



IT HAS certainly been an eventful last five years, since Singapore's last General Election (GE) in 2015. The country saw its first reserved Presidential Election in 2017, with history being made as the first Malay President in 47 years – and the first woman to become Head of State – was sworn in.

In 2016, Singaporeans witnessed a momentary health scare of sorts for the country's leadership. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong experienced a brief fainting spell during his National Day Rally speech. This came just three months after Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat collapsed during a cabinet meeting. Leadership renewal picked up soon after the last GE, for both the ruling

and main opposition parties.

The 38 Oxley Road saga also got an airing in Parliament, while politically sensitive water and public transport prices rose in the past five years. Of course, there's the coronavirus – a never-seen-before global pandemic that has sunk Singapore into its deepest recession and forced the government to dig deep into its reserves to fork out an unprecedented sum of nearly S\$100 billion to save jobs and keep businesses afloat. Yes, the years since the last general election have been rather eventful for Singapore politics. In this visual representation, we offer a bird's eye view of the key events during this period.

BY CHUANG PECK MING

Key political events since the 2015 general election

2016

President Tony Tan Keng Yam opens the 13th Parliament, outlining the government's plan to build a better and brighter future for Singaporean in his speech. The government will focus on five key areas – keep Singapore safe; renew the economy; push for a caring society; transform Singapore's urban landscape; and foster a partnership with Singaporeans.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat delivers his first Budget Statement, seeking to transform the economy through enterprise and innovation and to build a more caring and resilient society.

PAP candidate Murali Pillai beats SDP chief Chee Soon Juan in a by-election in Bukit Batok, called after the incumbent David Ong quit over an extra-marital affair. Mr Murali was part of the PAP's Aljunied GRC team that narrowly lost to the Workers' Party at the 2015 election.

Heng Swee Keat collapses at a Cabinet meeting on May 12 after suffering a stroke. DPM Tharman Shanmugaratnam covers his duties as Finance Minister. Mr Heng returns to work in August.

The Ministry of Home Affairs announces that foreign sponsors are not allowed to sponsor any event held at Speaker's Corner, in a bid to counter foreign interference.

PM Lee took ill while delivering his National Day Rally speech because of prolonged standing, heat and dehydration. His office says he is fine and did not suffer a stroke.

Former president S R Nathan, Singapore's sixth and longest-serving president, died in August at the age of 92. He was accorded a full state funeral.

Parliament passes changes to the Elected Presidency Act to allow for an election for the President to be reserved for a specific race, if no member from a particular race is elected for the past five terms. PM Lee announces that the 2017 presidential election will be reserved for the Malay community.



2017

Parliament passes the Retirement and Re-employment (Amendment) Bill to require employers to offer re-employment to employees until 67, up from 65, when employees reach the mandatory retirement age of 62.

Parliament passes laws under the Planning (Amendment) Act to ban short-term renting services such as Airbnb. The move comes after growing complaints against short-term rentals in 2016.

Heng Swee Keat says in his Budget Statement that water prices will increase 30 per cent in two stages, in the first water price hike in 17 years. A water conservation tax of 10 per cent is also slapped on Newater for business users.

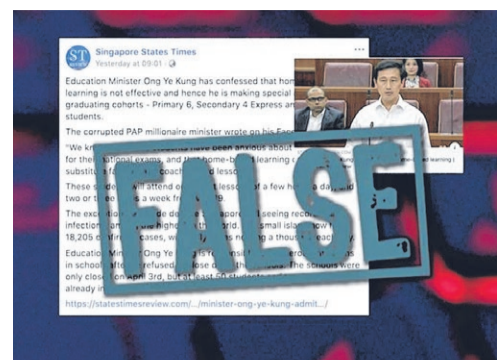
Mr Heng also proposes a carbon tax of S\$10 to S\$20 per tonne of emissions which will come into effect in 2019, as part of Singapore's efforts to cut greenhouse emissions.

Parliament debates the accusation of abuse of power made by PM Lee's two siblings in the 38 Oxley Road dispute. No evidence of abuse of power is found.

President Tony Tan steps down as Singapore's seventh President on August 31 after completing a six-year term. Council of Presidential Advisers chairman J Y Pillay temporarily serves as Acting President till a new president is elected.

Minister for Social and Family Development Tan Chuan-Jin is nominated to replace Halimah Yacob to be Speaker of Parliament.

Halimah Yacob wins the first reserved Presidential Election after a walkover, becoming Singapore's first Malay President in 47 years – and the country's first female head of state.



2018

Nine months after its formation, a 10-member Select Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods produces a 176-page report with 22 recommendations, which include laws urging tech companies to take proactive steps to tackle fake content and creating a framework to guide public education on falsehoods. The government must also have the power to limit or block the spread of fake news.

The government announces GST will go up to 9 per cent (from 7 per cent currently) some time between 2021 and 2025; GST will be expanded to digital services from 2020.

The government gives out a S\$700 million SG Bonus to 2.8 million Singaporeans, thanks to a S\$9.6 billion budget surplus in FY2017. Each eligible Singaporean gets up to S\$300.

Parliament passes the Carbon Pricing Bill which introduces a carbon tax with an initial rate of S\$5 per tonne of emissions.

The government extends the Proximity Housing Grant to singles buying HDB flats to be near to parents.

Veteran ministers Lim Hng Kiang, Lim Swee Say and Yaacob Ibrahim retire from Cabinet in a mid-term reshuffle which sees younger ministers heading two-thirds of the ministries. Chan Chun Sing is made Minister of Trade and Industry and Ong Ye Kung the sole Minister of Education.

At the opening of the second session of 13th Parliament, President Halimah says in her inaugural address that fourth generation leaders must "fire up" the new generation of Singaporeans and "earn the right to lead". They must "make bold moves, keep up the spirit of pioneers", tackle inequality and forge an inclusive society which is key to Singapore.

The Workers' Party faces multi-million dollar lawsuits for breaching fiduciary duties in running the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC).

Pritam Singh is elected unopposed as the new Secretary-General of the Workers' Party. Former chief Low Thia Khiong remains in the party's Central Executive Committee.

Younger political office holders settle on Heng Swee Keat as their leader and Chan Chun Sing as his deputy. Mr Heng is confirmed as PAP's First Assistant Secretary-General, paving the way for him to succeed PM Lee as Secretary General and Prime Minister after the next general election. Mr Chan is appointed the PAP's second Assistant Secretary-General.

Teo Chee Hean, Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Khaw Boon Wan step down from PAP's Central Executive Committee. The new CEC includes Ong Ye Kung, Ng Chee Meng, Indraneel Rajah, Lawrence Wong and Desmond Lee.

A report on 38 Oxley Road is delivered by a Ministerial Committee, laying out three options for the future of the house.



2019

Singapore celebrates its bicentennial, marking Sir Stamford Raffles landing on the island 200 years ago. A S\$1.1 billion Bicentennial Bonus in GST vouchers is handed out to 1.4 million lower-income Singaporeans. Each eligible Singaporean receives up to S\$300.

A S\$8 billion Merdeka Generation Package in enhanced subsidies for outpatient care, Medisave top-up and subsidies for Medishield life premiums is presented to Singaporeans born in the 1950s.

The Public Transport Council approves fare hikes of 7 per cent on train and bus fares from end-December, the highest percentage jump since 1998.

The government announces a three-pronged strategy to deal with climate change, including a planned second pump opposite Marina Barrage which could cost S\$100 billion stretching 50 to 100 years.

Heng Swee Keat is made Deputy Prime Minister in addition to being the Finance Minister, cementing his standing as the next Prime Minister. DPMs Teo Chee Hean and Tharman relinquish their appointments and are appointed as Senior Ministers. Mr Teo continues as

Coordinating Minister for National Security. Mr Tharman is redesignated as Coordinating Minister for Social Policies.

Parliament passes the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (Pofma) to tackle the spread of fake news. People who make false or misleading statements online face fines of between S\$30,000 and up to S\$1 million, and/or up to 10 years' jail.

PM Lee announces that the statutory retirement age is to rise from 62 to 63 in 2022 and 65 by 2030. The re-employment age cap is to be extended from 67 to 68 in 2022 and 70 by 2030.

The Prime Minister's Office announces in September that the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee has been formed.

Singapore Progress Party veteran Chiam See Tong steps down as party chief, handing the reins over to former Non-Constituency MP Steve Chia.

The High Court finds Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh and his fellow Aljunied GRC MPs Sylvia Lim and Low Thia Khiong guilty of breaching fiduciary duties and liable for damages suffered by AHTC, which is said to have made millions in improper payments under their watch. DPM Heng Swee Keat moves a motion in Parliament calling Ms Lim and Mr Low to recuse themselves from all financial matters and oversight in relation to AHTC. The WP leaders are appealing against the High Court judgement.



2020

Covid-19 pandemic: In the beginning of January, the Ministry of Health (MOH) issues a health advisory on a pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan, signalling that Singapore is at the yellow level in its Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (Dorscon).

The first Covid-19 case is reported in Singapore on Jan 23, a traveller from Wuhan. MOH later extends quarantine measures to all travellers arriving from China.

The Dorscon level is raised to orange in February, signalling that the virus is severe, very contagious but has not spread widely in Singapore. In late-March, Singapore closes its door to tourists and short-term visitors, shuts pubs and entertainment outlets and bans large gatherings.

In early-April, PM Lee announces "circuit breaker" measures that put Singapore virtually in lockdown. On June 1, Singapore exits the circuit breaker and begins to reopen its economy in three phases.

Singapore is at high risk of going into its deepest recession in recent memory this year. MTI further adjusts its 2020 GDP growth forecast down to -7 to -4 per cent. GDP in the first three months shrinks 0.7 per cent year-on-year and a seasonally-adjusted 4.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

The Ministry of Manpower's preliminary report says total employment in the first quarter saw its sharpest drop since the Sars outbreak in 2003. Total employment, excluding foreign domestic workers, plunges by 19,900.

DPM Heng presents a total of four budgets in under four months to allocate an unprecedented total of S\$93 billion to save jobs and keep businesses afloat in the battle against Covid-19. A total of S\$52 billion is being drawn from the past reserves to fund the budgets.

The Electoral Boundaries Review Committee releases its report. The 14th Parliament will have 93 MPs from 31 constituencies (14 single wards and 17 GRCs), up from the present 89 MPs from 22 constituencies. Six-member GRCs will be dropped and all GRCs will be capped at five members going forward.

PM Lee addresses the nation on June 23 on why he is calling the General Election. President Halimah dissolves the 13th Parliament and issues the Writ of Election. Nomination Day will be on June 30 and Polling Day on July 10.

