

# Signs point to election in Sept, say observers

Sept 12 is the date most bandied about; observers agree that the date looks likely

Walter Sim

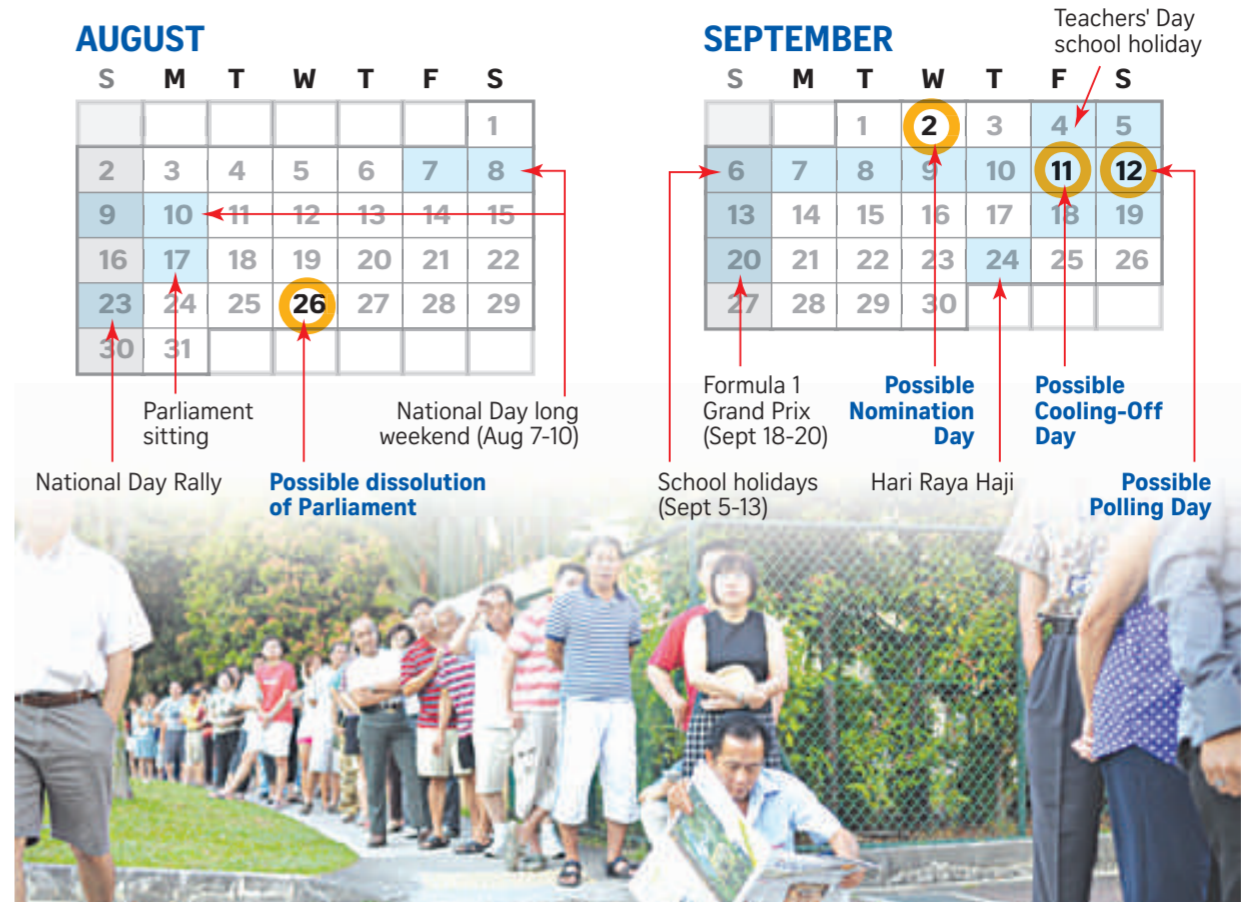
Talk that the general election might be held in September has gathered pace, with the boundaries report out last Friday and voter rolls now open for public inspection. The date most cited, and already spreading like wildfire in text messages and on social media: Sept 12. The Prime Minister has the prerogative to decide when to call an election. But one clear sign that the polls might be called soon was People's Action Party organising secretary Ng Eng Hen's comments on Sunday that the party is likely to begin formally unveiling new candidates after National Day. Add the feel-good effect of Singapore's golden jubilee celebrations and a National Day Rally on

Aug 23 for PM Lee Hsien Loong to give a "last rallying call and present the (Government's) report card", and that is why veteran MP Inderjit Singh thinks: "Things won't get sweeter than that from the Government's perspective." He agreed a Sept 12 date looks likely. It is the last Saturday of the week-long school holidays. Schools are typically used as polling stations, and teachers tapped to man these stations. Mr Singh, an MP of 18 years, said yesterday that he sees "no point delaying it until the end of the year." "The major policies are out of the way, there is nothing new to be announced, and when that happens, it means the party has already delivered what it has promised." He noted that the goods and services tax vouchers will be given out

next month to those who qualify. In past elections, Parliament was dissolved within two months of the release of the boundaries report. Parliament will next sit on Aug 17. That could be its last session should it be dissolved in the week after the National Day Rally. Going by the timeline of the 2011 election, this could mean the Writ of Election would be issued on Aug 26. That would point to Nomination Day - which must be at least five working days from the date the election writ is issued - falling on Sept 2. It would mark the start of the traditional nine-day campaign period until Sept 10. Cooling-Off Day would be on Sept 11, with voters heading to the polls on Sept 12. That weekend period in September is the most likely because Singapore's Formula One Grand Prix takes place from Sept 18 to 20. School examinations rule out October and early November as windows for an election. And the second half of November is a busy peri-

## Will it be Sept 12?

As talk swirls of an imminent election, The Straits Times looks at possible key dates in the run-up to the polls.



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od of global summits which involve PM Lee and other ministers. The question now, said political observer and former Nominated MP Eugene Tan, is whether Mr Lee will buck the trend of dissolving Parliament within two months of the

boundaries report being released. "If you go by precedent, it would suggest that elections are likely to be in September. But that precedent is not binding. It is also likely that the rather early release of the report and PM's get-

ting it published immediately only means he is keeping to his assurance to Parliament, to make sure enough time has elapsed between the report's release and the polls." walsim@sph.com.sg

## GREAT RESPECT FOR 'PEOPLE'S MP'



When I read that Inderjit was retiring, two thoughts came into my mind. First, that at 55, he had many more years to contribute and was big-hearted to retire now, so that younger candidates could stand in his place.

I have great respect for Inderjit and learnt from his many good speeches in Parliament. He has a heart for the daily struggles of Singaporeans and could put it across in heartfelt and effective ways. When he spoke, ministers took note and followed up. He was a people's MP.

Second, I thought we should do better than just Facebook postings for retiring MPs. After many years of service, the party should try to find a more dignified and deliberate way to announce their retirement. So when we announce new candidates, whenever possible, we will do it together with their retiring MPs that they are taking over. I hope this approach will do justice to the many years of contribution that MPs like Inderjit have given to serve their residents.



DR NG ENH HEN, PAP organising secretary and Defence Minister, when asked about earlier comments he made about Mr Singh's decision to announce his retirement online

# Inderjit 'not quitting PAP, will help campaign'

Tham Yuen-C

Veteran MP Inderjit Singh, who announced last week that he will retire from politics at the next general election, said yesterday he remains a People's Action Party (PAP) member and will help Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to campaign during the elections. His latest remarks on his Facebook page came amid social media chatter and online reports that Mr Singh, 55 - one of six MPs for Ang Mo Kio GRC, which is helmed by Mr Lee - had quit the ruling party. He dismissed the talk, saying he had asked Mr Lee way back in January 2013 if he could step down. "I have contributed almost 20 years as an MP and wanted to spend time on my work and family," he said, adding: "I remain a PAP member and will be assisting the Prime Minister in his election cam-

paign in Ang Mo Kio." The online comments about Mr Singh leaving the party arose after his Facebook post last Friday night declared that he was retiring from politics. It came hours after the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee's report was released. Some netizens and online news sites then dug up and put online past speeches he had made in Parliament and suggested he had been "forced" to quit for speaking out against some government policies. They cited as further proof the boundaries committee's recommendation that Mr Singh's Kebun Baru ward be carved out of Ang Mo Kio GRC. It will be part of Nee Soon GRC at the next elections. Reacting to the chatter online, Mr Singh said in his Facebook post yesterday: "I read with amusement that some people have taken my old speeches and reposted them with a headline that I have left the PAP.

The White Paper speech was made in early 2013 and the one on the response to the President's Address was posted in May 2014." Before his latest post, PAP organising secretary Ng Eng Hen, who is Defence Minister, had said on Sunday that the party wanted to handle the retirement of its MPs in a "more deliberate and dignified manner". He added: "You can post your retirement on Facebook but I think... an MP who has served 15, 20 even 30 years... that's not the best way to do it. For many of them, they'll have to prepare their ground, ensure... continuity and say goodbye." Some websites read the comment as directed at Mr Singh - the only MP to have announced his retirement on Facebook - and said it was a sign of "in-fighting" in the PAP. When asked about it yesterday, Mr Singh said: "If there was in-fighting, would I be helping PM Lee with his campaign?"

Separately, Dr Ng, when asked about the online chatter, told The Straits Times: "I thought we should do better than just Facebook postings for retiring MPs. After many years of service, the party should try to find a more dignified and deliberate way to announce their retirement." That is why the PAP will announce the retirement of its MPs together with the introduction of new candidates where possible, to honour the veterans for their contributions, he added. Dr Ng also paid tribute to Mr Singh, describing him as an MP who "has a heart" for Singaporeans and who knew how to put across their daily struggles in heartfelt and effective ways. "I have great respect for Inderjit and learnt from his many good speeches in Parliament," he said. yuenc@sph.com.sg

# S'porean deported from Turkey, detained here for attempt to join ISIS

Lim Yan Liang

A 51-year-old Singaporean who was on his way to Syria to join militant group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Mustafa Sultan Ali is the first Singaporean to be arrested abroad for trying to join ISIS, which has attracted 30,000 foreign fighters to territory it controls in Syria and Iraq, including about 1,000 from South-east Asia. He also told the Singapore authorities that he was prepared to carry out attacks here, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said in a statement yesterday. Mustafa, whose occupation was not disclosed by MHA, left Singapore in late May for a neighbouring country and boarded a flight to Turkey from there. He took that route in the hope of hiding his tracks. Mustafa planned to cross into Syria from the Turkish border, but was detained by the authorities in Turkey. He was deported to Singapore and arrested last month. "Investigations showed that Mustafa had been deeply radicalised by the terrorist ideology of ISIS and other radical ideologists he had come across online," the MHA said. "He had travelled to Turkey and tried to make his way to Syria in order to participate in armed vio-

lence by fighting alongside ISIS." "Mustafa also said that he was prepared to carry out ISIS-directed terrorist attacks against Western establishments in Singapore." Mustafa was issued with a two-year order of detention under the ISA this month. He is the second person to be detained for terror-related activity this year. In April, student M. Arifil Azim Putra Norja'i, 19, was detained for having made plans to join ISIS in Syria. He also said if he could not do so, he intended to carry out violent attacks here, including to assassinate the president and prime minister. Last month, a 17-year-old self-radicalised youth who had made plans to join ISIS was placed under a restriction order, which limits his activities. Yesterday, community leaders greeted the announcement of Mustafa's case with dismay, and said it highlighted the worrying reach of ISIS' radical ideology. They also felt it was worrying that his radicalisation was not detected until his capture abroad. Dr Mohamed Ali, vice-chairman of the Religious Rehabilitation Group which counsels terror detainees, said the latest case was a reminder that such ideology does not appeal only to impressionable youths, and that the threat posed by such virulent ideas to the region and Singapore was growing.

Dr Mohamed said the Muslim community had to continue efforts to promote a better understanding of the true teachings of Islam, such as promoting peace and respect for followers of other faiths. But individuals should also look out for warning signs of radicalisation, he said. "We need to monitor not only young people, but also anyone who has the tendency to become radicalised." At least two Singaporeans are known to have gone to Syria to join ISIS, and both have taken their families and young children along. They are still believed to be there. The security authorities in the region are also concerned that their citizens fighting in Syria will pose a major threat when they return home, just as an earlier generation of radicals who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s posed a threat when they returned. The MHA said the Government takes a very serious view of any form of support for terrorism, including but not limited to the use of violence, and will take firm and decisive action against anyone who engages in such activities. Those who are aware that someone is involved in them should call 1800-2626-473 or 999, it added. yanliang@sph.com.sg

SEE WORLD A10

## PREPARED FOR S'PORE ATTACKS

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MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, in a statement

# Questions over help received in bid to reach Syria

The announcement that a Singaporean has been detained for trying to join militant group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has revived questions over the reach of the group in South-east Asia, and why it continues to win followers. A key concern, analysts say, is how much help Mustafa Sultan Ali, who was captured in Turkey and deported last month, received in his bid to travel to Syria to fight for ISIS. Counter-terrorism analysts said accounts of how fighters from Malaysia and Indonesia made their way to Syria suggest that ISIS may have cultivated a South-east Asian network of online recruiters capable of communicating with, and arranging passage for, would-be fighters from the region to enter Turkey and then Syria. Mr Jasmin Singh of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) said Mustafa likely made contact with an ISIS fighter or recruiter through social media. "For him to fly to Turkey, he would most likely have made contact with an agent - someone from the other side to take him across the land border to Syria," he said. This agent would likely have been a European or Malaysian fighter who spoke to him in English or Malay, Mr Singh added. He said there is also the possibility that Mustafa might have met a secondary handler in the neigh-

bouring country he travelled to. Mr Singh noted that the e-mail addresses and phone numbers of militants have been routinely shared on extremist websites and on social media. He believes Mustafa likely travelled to Turkey through Malaysia, Thailand or Indonesia to avoid being detected by security agencies. Experts also say Mustafa's case is significant, given that a large number of those investigated for radical activity in recent years tend to be youths or young adults. At 51, Mustafa has a profile similar to that of members of regional terror group Jemaah Islamiyah detained from around 2001 who, like ISIS, sought to establish a caliphate. Fellow RSIS analyst Vikram Rajakumar said that for a middle-aged person with some religious grounding to embrace ISIS' ideology could mean he has a strong anti-establishment streak, for instance. "If you have a perceived way of how you want to live your life, and you are unable to do so, you might see this as an avenue out... where you leave your worldly belongings and have a fresh start in some utopia," he said. He added: "Ideologically, if this person is for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and he is unable to travel to Syria to fight, Singapore then becomes a target." Lim Yan Liang