They are the most youthful slate of new People's Action Party candidates since 1991.

They were brought in to renew the party's leadership and keep in touch with younger voters who now account for one in four of 2.4 million eligible voters.

Esther Ng speaks to political analysts on the impact of the youth vote on leadership renewal and whether the party’s leadership renewal thrives best under a one-party rule.

To many, Tin Pei Ling’s introduction as a PAP candidate was the moment when the issue of age and experience came into sharp focus in this General Election.

At 27, she is the party’s youngest candidate since 1976.

Critical responses to videos and photos posted of the youthful Ms Tin on her Facebook and online have prompted some to ask if the government was seeking new blood at any cost.

Another point to note: the median age of this batch of 24 new PAP candidates is 38.5 - lower than the 41 in the last 2 general elections.

Assistant Professor of Law Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University shares his view.

“This emphasis on youth in a way reflects the concern about the 4th generation leadership renewal. It’s also trying to deal with the demographic realities in which voters between 21 and 35 years of age would now constitute a quarter of the voting population, so that’s a
very significant number to begin with and for many of them they are also first time voters. So I suppose the aim is try to get them young is something high on the agenda of the PAP leadership."

Dr Tan adds that the PAP needs to manage how older voters react to a fairly young line-up.

"Simply because there is still a sizeable number of older voters and the accent on youth may lead some voters to think that the PAP is pressing ahead with renewal without in a way putting emphasis on experience."

In other countries, the careers of politicians take off when they are in their forties and last well into their fifties, or even sixties.

But in Singapore, politicians in the slightly older age group are retired. A quarter to a third of the MPs from the ruling party make way for new blood at every general election. Political watcher Zulkifli Baharudin explains.

"The whole process of producing an effective leader and politician is so difficult that they need to exposure people much earlier than before because I think most of the people unlike the past, their exposure to grassroots is much less, so you have to induct them in the political process, so you see them bringing in the young much earlier age."

Based on where the new candidates are likely to be fielded, it's clear there's a critical need for new blood in Group Representation Constituencies or GRCs where anchor ministers need to plan for succession.

For instance, Major-General (NS) Chan Chun Sing in Tanjong Pagar GRC; Brigadier-General (NS) Tan Chuan-Jin in Marine Parade GRC and former central banker Heng Swee Keat in Tampines GRC.

SMU's Eugene Tan explains.

"Since the introduction of the GRC scheme in 1988, the PAP has fielded all their new candidates only through the GRC, so it is an established fact the GRCs provide the sort of nurturing ground. But I think in this election, we see for example what I call the star rookies, the two generals being put in fairly high profile GRCs essentially headed by Minister Mentor or Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and I think here is really in a way emphasize the message of renewal."

But political commentator P N Balji says this has altered the starting premise of the GRC
scheme.

"The GRCs were set up and the government’s reason was for minority representation. Mr Lee Kuan Yew a couple of years ago said if we don’t have GRCs we will never be able to bring talent into government, into cabinet."

However, Mr Zulkifli feels there is a good reason for GRCs to be a nurturing ground for the party’s new leaders.

"I can see the PAP’s point is that if you start with the best and brightest, and you expose them in a very harsh way, many people won’t want to become politicians."

In recent times, the PAP has admitted that it has had difficulty finding and persuading talented citizens to enter politics.

This has led some to question whether a one-party system throws up the best candidates.

But Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that leadership renewal thrives best under a one-party system as there is not enough talent in Singapore to form two A teams to govern well.

A two-party system, he argued, would result in a weaker system.

Mr Zulkifli agrees.

"Because we’re less distracted by politicking, they are able to plan succession within the party. For government is able to go through the demands of government of society at large in a more orderly manner without the distractions of a multi-party system."

Noting that the PAP has conducted its political renewal successfully in this way in the past, Mr Balji asks if social changes seen necessitate a re-look at the process.

"If you look back the PAP renewal process, it’s so well orchestrated, so well conducted, so well planned and that has worked all this while. I’m not sure whether the same form or same way of structuring the next leadership will work. Why do I say that? Because I think fundamentally, society is undergoing a major transformation from the coming of foreigners to post 75-ers to older people who have different issues. I don’t think anybody will say that this is a bad government. I think the issue is, can we have more discussion, can our views be heard, I think that is the point."

SMU’s Professor Tan explains why the case for a two-party system has come up.
"Simply because the PAP's brew of tea may not be palatable to some people, and I think there is the view that maybe with a two-party system, not only is the political system not dependent on the PAP being good, but it also means we can avoid a situation of systemic failure if PAP were to become corrupt. But also in a two-party system, the nature of political competition, we would be able to bring out people of different political persuasion, people who can present different visions to Singaporeans."

The political commentators spoken to however, agree that the PAP will - and perhaps should - continue to nurture its leaders rather than leave leadership renewal at the highest level to chance.

Mr Zulkifli elaborates.

"If you look at the generation of MM, it was a very unique time in Singapore which surfaced great leaders. The demands of society will naturally surface great leaders. Fortunately, not only were they great, they devoted their life to public service, although along the way Singapore has prospered. I can recall many of our ministers could have joined private sector and made a lot of money but they didn't, I think we can't wait a for similar situation to come to raise great leaders for Singapore."

One way of doing that, Mr Zulkifli says, is to expose more Singaporeans from the public and private sector at an earlier to political education.

"And that means opening up more of our institutions to participation, opening up more of our institutions to diversity, to exposure, opening up avenues where they can really make a really difference not just at the highest level of office but in the many institutions that we have."

Professor Tan believes the PAP will continue to nurture its rookie MPs and at the same time identify high-fliers and putting them into position of increasing responsibilities and monitor how well they perform.

"Both tracks have worked well. And if you look at the class of 2001 MPs, they identified 7 candidates then whom they regarded having ministerial potential and so hence the term Super Seven, not all of them made it to become Ministers. And you also have an MP who was first elected in 2001, who wasn’t one of the seven identified but is now holding a Ministerial appointment and that’s the Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong."

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong had suggested recently that leadership renewal could be
enhanced or speeded up if Cabinet ministers were to serve only two terms. This is to encourage more talented Singaporeans to come forward.

Reactions to this have been mixed.

Mr Balji feels the two-term criteria for party renewal is good but politically, it is not for the PAP. He explains.

"Simple reason is that if I were one of those who want to come into cabinet and my term is only two terms, would I want to go in? Already people don't want to get in to government, so they are finding it so difficult, so now you put one more barrier. Would people want to come in?"

But Mr Zulkifli disagrees. He argues that the PAP might consider restricting Cabinet ministers if it wants to engender diversity within the party. Doing this might encourage more political aspirants.

"It's very hard to do that if you do not allow for flexibility for people to come in and still maintain the youthfulness, robustness, the diversity that the party can have from within the Singapore population. So I think that kind of transition is important to have. How we do it over time is yet to be seen because in the past, most people who switch from private to government sector have made it a life-long career switch. But I think this has to change. If we look at mature economies in Europe and the US, I think there's an easy transition. If we allow that, then I think more people will come forward to serve."

The PAP has unveiled 24 new candidates for this General Election.

Seven of these candidates are from the labour movement compared to two each in previous elections of 2006 and 2001.

As for private sector candidates, there were 12 out of 25 in 2001; and 13 out of 24 in 2006.

This time, the private sector yielded nine or just one third of the slate of new candidates. They include three lawyers, two from the banking industry, one business consultant, one commodities trader and one from SBS Transit.

This makes it the first time since 1976 that candidates from the public sector have outnumbered those from the private sector.

In spite of this, analysts say the PAP will continue to seek talent from diverse backgrounds
to meet the needs of all Singaporeans. It will just have to cast its net wider - and be more persuasive in convincing potential candidates that joining the ruling party is a higher call.