11 ISSUES FOR GE '11

1. SCHOLARS IN OPPOSITION

"With their gilt-edged resumes, these Oxbridge and Ivy League graduates from the opposition - like lawyer Chen Show Mao, 50 - could fit in with the People’s Action Party. Four are even former government scholars: the National Solidarity Party’s Mr Tony Tan, 41, and Ms Hazel Poa, 41, and the Singapore People’s Party’s Mr Benjamin Pwee, 43, and Mr Jimmy Lee, 35. Their credentials may just be the thing to convince swing voters to vote opposition, reckon political risk consultant Ashar Ghanii.

"Since the opposition is campaigning on being an alternative, having solid credentials for the candidates is a big plus point," he says.

2. "Y-FT" ACCESS

The PAP’s youngest candidate, Tin Pei Ling, 27, may have attracted the wrong kind of online buzz but, by bringing her in as a candidate, the PAP is clearly out to woo younger "Gen Y" voters. It won’t be easy, Gen Y voters also rank the cost of living as the main issue in the coming polls but, unlike their older counterparts, are less awed by or attached to the PAP.

Former Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong says this group of younger voters does not feel "belonging to the PAP" and will vote differently from their parents.

"So I believe the PAP will be concerned about Gen Y."

3. COST OF LIVING

Forget high ideals and future leaders, this election may be decided on dollars and cents - and the increasing amount people need to meet the rising cost of living.

With inflation at a two-year high, food, electricity and transportation have all seen steep price increases, and this will weigh heavily on people’s minds.

Indeed, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong has admitted the PAP must face the issue head-on.

"I would not duck the issues because politics is about people’s livelihoods," he said on Monday.

4. HOUSING Woes

Nothing touches a raw nerve with Singaporeans more than the subject of housing - particularly if they are unable to afford it.

"Housing isn't just something Singaporeans think about; it's what they talk with," says political analyst Eugene Tan.

"As private and HDB markets scale new heights, young couples are looking anxiously at their finances as they think of settling down and starting a family.

"Have four rounds of cooling measures been enough to slow the market and stay the hand of the unhappy voter?"

5. FOREIGN UNSEASE

Linger ing tensions over competition for jobs, school and university places as well as complaints over crowded trains are fertile ground for the opposition.

"To ease these concerns, the Government raised foreign worker levies and tightened quotas last July. The opposition has so far been trading around the issue carefully and moeten alternative solutions instead of rattle-rousing. But former Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong says that he still expects the opposition to capitalise on the subject.

"It's an emotive issue so if the opposition can focus on that, it could become big."
HOT SEATS
Not since 1988 has the line-up of match-ups been this long. At least 71 of the 87 seats could see fights.
We are also likely to see the return of three-cornered fights, in single seats such as Joo Chiat, Radin Mas and Pioneer, although opposition parties are trying hard to avoid coming to blows and knocking each other out.
What all this means is that voters here will see one of the “most intense campaigns in recent times”, says Singapore Management University lecturer Eugene Tan.

AG LEADERSHIP
Is the much-touted “4G” just an enhancement of the PAP’s current leadership or a true upgrade, asks Nanyang Technological University associate professor Cherian George.
However you receive it, the signal from the PAP is clear. The coming polls will bleed the next generation of Singapore’s leaders and decide the fate of the nation.
With at least five of its 24 new faces exhibiting ministerial potential, this could be a watershed event.
“I actually think the ruling party may be understating how big 4G is. This is going to be a paradigm shift... a game changer - insert your own cliche here, and you would be right,” says Dr George.

NEW BENCHMARKS
Both the PAP and the opposition will see this election as a test of sorts. The opposition wants to win a GRC to break the system it feels the PAP has designed to give itself an advantage. If they fail, they could take two steps back. But if they succeed, it will strike a psychological blow to the ruling party and be a clear sign of progress, say analysts.
It is also a numbers game for the PAP. The last time round, it won 56.6 per cent of the valid votes and the question is whether this figure will go down significantly.
Former Nominated MP Zulkifli Baharudin says that the PAP will see a sliding margin as an indication of eroding influence.

BUYING “INSURANCE”
Finance is suddenly getting an unlikely starring role as the Workers’ Party argues that voting opposition is like taking out an insurance policy against the possibility of a corrupt and failed government in future.
The PAP has shot back, asking if the opposition can really deliver when the “policyholders” eventually need to make a claim.
In the meantime, the party has bought some insurance of its own. Acknowledging the demand for more opposition voices in Parliament, it has expanded the number of “best loser” Non-Constituency MP seats from three to a maximum of nine.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE
With the rules relaxed, this general election will likely Facebook and Twitter its way into the history books.
All the parties are already actively pushing their messages and campaign promises online. Points scored and lost will be quickly amplified as people upload unedited videos of political rallies and walkabouts, and share links instantly with friends and family.
Still, Dr George reckons this online activity may eventually die down.
“As the campaign intensifies, they will have to devote more resources to offline campaigning,” he says. “The online action we have seen so far might be overtaken.”

WILD CARDS
In 2001, it was Dr Chee Soon Juan heckling then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong at a hawker centre.
In 2006, the heckling came from a fictitious “bak chor mee” noodle seller, wickedly pondering the controversy surrounding Workers’ Party candidate James Gomez.
This time round, who knows what surprises are in store. They may even trump any or all of the issues above.