

S'pore parliament expected to take mid-term break in April: PM

Lee

Parliament is expected to take its mid-term break in April, after next year's Budget sitting, for the government to take stock of its work and map out a new legislative programme, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

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Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (AFP/Roslan Rahman)

SINGAPORE: Singapore's Parliament is expected to take its mid-term break in April, after next year's Budget sitting.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong revealed this to reporters at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Mr Lee also weighed in on calls for Singapore to have an official poverty line.

The mid-term break for Parliament is a way for the government to take stock of its work and map out a new legislative programme.

Mr Lee said that he intends to prorogue Parliament sometime in April, and this will essentially set a fresh starting point for the rest of the government's term, and set a new direction for the team.

He said: "We will do it after Budget next year, we are thinking of doing it sometime in April and then reopen in May. Precise dates we will settle later on, but that's roughly the time frame."

Singapore's 11th Parliament was prorogued in 2009, three years after it was sworn in. The current Parliament was sworn in, in 2011.

Separately, Mr Lee was asked about recent calls to set an official poverty line for Singapore.

A Singapore Management University and Lien Foundation report said that Singaporeans are not aware of the scale of poverty because of the lack of information.

The report said the government should define poverty not just on monetary terms but by using a broad spectrum of definition, such as whether a person can lift himself out of poverty.

Mr Lee said Singapore's poor face varied problems -- from low income households, to those with dependents, or families facing temporary difficulties.

Mr Lee said: "Some are broken family problems. Some are problems of children not managing in school and therefore have difficulty. Some are low-income, they don't have the skills, we need to raise their skills and jobs and pay. Focusing on all these things is productive, then you know what you want to solve, and deal with it."

"To have a definition of poverty that encompasses all different kinds of problems and to say, this is the poverty number in Singapore, that is the scale, and it's a very big number and we are very alarmed, because we have been ignoring this problem and now let's focus and solve the problem and put the resources in. I don't think that is the situation and that is the good approach.

"To define all those very different circumstances...My definition of poverty will have to be as complicated as kueh lapis."

He said what is important is to decide on where the help should go, and how much to help.

Mr Lee said: "We cannot avoid a social judgment of which needs the society considers meritorious, which needs we consider urgent, which needs we consider well, it's a problem, but we can leave them to sort out.

"Or it's a problem but it's really something that somebody has caused to happen because of his own doing and he has to sort it out. Otherwise, there's no end to him coming to me to say 'I've got myself into trouble, please bail me out'."

The government has said that its approach is to have multiple lines of assistance, and help schemes are also flexible enough to ensure that those who miss the criteria are also helped.