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As Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean rightly pointed out, Singapore's Constitution requires that the next General Election (GE) be held by April 2021 at the latest.

Constitutional rules providing deadlines for elections to be held are meant to prevent any government from holding power indefinitely without a democratic mandate and prevent Singapore from having no government at all.

Some have called on President Halimah Yacob to circumvent the rules by issuing a proclamation of emergency under Article 150 of the Constitution.

As Mr Teo acknowledged, under a proclamation of emergency, Parliament could pass emergency legislation delaying GEs.

But a proclamation of emergency will give Parliament much wider powers than that. Parliament will have the power to pass laws overriding provisions of the Constitution — other than a narrow few — for a potentially indefinite time.

For example, Parliament will have the power to pass legislation providing for forced labour — contrary to Article 10(2); the banishment or exclusion of citizens from Singapore — contrary to Article 13(1); the suspension of rules guaranteeing a fair legal process for those accused of crimes — contrary to Article 9; or the suspension of judicial oversight of government action — contrary to Article 93.

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Those who call for a proclamation of emergency to be issued should think carefully about whether the present state of affairs is the sort of situation that warrants giving Parliament such powers. Emergency powers are not to be taken lightly.

Perhaps, instead of seeking to delay the GE, our efforts ought to focus on finding ways to hold it in a manner that gives effect to democratic principles and provides a level playing field for candidates, while maintaining infection-control measures.

Possibilities include holding rallies online rather than in person, providing more time for candidates' campaign speeches to be broadcast on television, and allowing staggered voting — across multiple days if necessary.

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