

PM: New ministries to engage better and enhance safety nets

Mr Lee said the changes will help the Government serve Singaporeans better. He also asked citizens to work with the Government to build a better Singapore for all.

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AsiaOne, 1 August 2012

Three new ministries will be formed from Nov 1 after two existing ministries are restructured, said the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday.

This was announced in a statement alongside a reshuffling of the Cabinet.

The new ministries are the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), and the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI).

They were created to better engage Singaporeans and enhance existing social-safety nets, said the PMO.

In a Facebook update yesterday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the Government wants to "focus sharply on three priority areas".

These areas include strengthening families and social-safety nets; promoting arts and sports, building social capital and engaging the young; and improving public communications and engagement.

He added: "These changes will help us to serve Singaporeans better. I hope that all Singaporeans will give my team your full support, and work with us to build a better Singapore for all."

The new ministries are a result of the redistribution of portfolios from the existing Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (Mica), and Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS).

The functions of MCI, which is renamed from Mica, include infocomm-technology development and overseeing the Government's information and public-communications policies.

MSF, renamed from MCYS, will promote the family as a social unit and help those in need of social support.

MCCY is a completely new ministry. Its functions include fostering social cohesion, engaging youth and developing sports. The ministry will also assume Mica's current arts, heritage and national-resilience functions.

Political observers told my paper that the reorganisation of the ministries reflects the Government's desire for deeper engagement with Singaporeans.

Associate Professor Alan Chong of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies said: "(The focuses of these ministries) are related to very big issues arising from last year's General Election and the by-election this year, such as integrating new citizens and foreigners in the workplace.

"You can see that there is movement to meet the grouses on the ground halfway."

Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, said that the new ministries will also help the Government give a stronger focus on "complex policy areas", such as the widening income gap.

Two of the new ministries will be headed by first-term Members of Parliament (MPs).

Mr Chan Chun Sing will be Acting Minister for Social and Family Development, while Mr Lawrence Wong will become Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

Mr Chan, Mr Wong and another first-term MP, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, will also be promoted to Senior Ministers of State today.

Mr Tan will be Acting Minister for Manpower. He was previously Minister of State for Manpower. Among other changes announced, Ms Grace Fu will be promoted today to become the second female full minister in Singapore.

She will be a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Environment and Water Resources.

Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam will relinquish his appointment as Manpower Minister, while Mr Lui Tuck Yew will relinquish his appointment as Second Minister for Foreign Affairs.