

PM Lee reinforces team as governance becomes "more complicated"

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who announced several changes to the Cabinet and other political appointments on Wednesday, said he has been building up and reinforcing his team since the last general election as governance becomes more complicated.

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Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Wednesday announced several changes to the Cabinet and other political appointments.

Mr Lee said he has been building up and reinforcing his team since the last general election as governance becomes more complicated.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of his official visit to China, he said: "I think the tasks have become more complicated and more intense.

"I've also been making changes to the structure of the administration that I've got - Ministry of Social and Family Development split off, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth created last year, I have the National Population and Talent Division, which is not quite a ministry but more than just a department which comes under the Prime Minister's Office.

"These ministries and departments and divisions need to be staffed with political leadership, people who can oversee the ministry, the work of management and government, but also people who can do the political work, which means going out, outreach, engaging Singaporeans, engaging different groups, understanding what people are feeling, getting our views across and making sure we know how people are feeling.

"And I think for that, we need a team which has a varied range of talents and abilities and it's a team which you build up gradually over time. You don't do it overnight."

The latest changes will see promotions as well as new appointments.

One year since he was made Acting Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Chan Chun Sing will become a full minister from 1 September.

He will also be appointed Second Defence Minister.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin will relinquish his appointment as Senior Minister of State for National Development.

He remains Acting Minister for Manpower.

Dr Amy Khor will be promoted to Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower.

Mrs Josephine Teo will be promoted to Senior Minister of State for Finance and Transport.

Also promoted are Dr Maliki Osman and Ms Sim Ann, who will both be ministers of state.

Dr Maliki will remain in the Defence and National Development Ministries. Ms Sim Ann will remain in the Education and Communications and Information Ministries.

Two new office holders will also be appointed.

They are Mr Desmond Lee, who will be Minister of State for National Development, and Ms Low Yen Ling, who will be Parliamentary Secretary for Social and Family Development.

"They both have been good backbenchers and I think they worked hard and people have gotten to know them and I'm sure they will make a contribution," said Prime Minister Lee.

All the appointments will take effect from September, except for Ms Low, who will assume her new post from October.

Mr Lee said: "I've promoted Chun Sing this year. Others in his batch who are in the team, Tan Chuan-Jin and Lawrence who became Acting Ministers last year, I will consider (them) in future exercises, depending on how they perform, of course."

Political observers say the latest changes represent an incremental step towards leadership renewal in Singapore.

And there'll probably be more changes made before the next General Election due by 2016. What's clear is that the current Cabinet represents the next generation of leaders for the country.

Prime Minister Lee said: "It is not for me to determine my successor. It's for the young people, the younger ministers in the team, to work out amongst themselves whom they will support as their leader. I think the people who are in the Cabinet now will be an important part of the next generation of leaders for Singapore."

Mr Lee added he hopes to reinforce his team further as he makes an annual review of appointments.

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, Dr Gillian Koh, described the Cabinet changes as "small steps towards succession planning at the leadership level".

She pointed to Mr Desmond Lee and Ms Low Yen Ling who were both pulled in from the backbench.

"It's always interesting to see who from the backbench will be trusted to take on a little bit more responsibility," said Dr Koh.

Associate Professor of Law at the Singapore Management University, Eugene Tan, said: "The changes announced today indicate the conscious effort to introduce and test new office holders."

He added: "The process to put in place a 4G leadership takes on greater salience and urgency now that we are almost mid-way through the life of the current Parliament. There is a sense that the new blood needs to be more visible and to learn the ropes."

Risk consultant Devadas Krishnadas said a political strategy has emerged where leaders are spread across the ranks.

"One, historically the emphasis has been on a very strong first rank of leaders. Now they are emphasising a strong second and third rank, strength in depth is a key issue.

"The second is, this issue of diversity, not only in gender but ethnicity, skills sets and political abilities and third in recognising that the challenges have become more complex and varied, is that the number of political office holders is as large as it's ever been in government.

"We've now with these promotions, exceeded 50 political office holders and I think that represents what the prime minister has suggested as reinforcement and to ensure that there's depth and breath in government as it moves forward towards 2016," he said.