

## Promotions with eye on future

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At a sweeping Cabinet reshuffle after the last general election in 2011, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had said: “I wanted a fresh start and that’s why I’ve gone for radical change.”

Yesterday, two of those touted to be part of the “fresh line-up” to Singapore’s fourth-generation core leadership were promoted from acting to full ministers.

From tomorrow, Tan Chuan-Jin will take on the role of full minister in the Ministry of Manpower. Lawrence Wong will become full minister in the Ministry for Culture, Community and Youth, and second minister for Communications and Information.

Political observers told My Paper that the move was made with an eye on the next general election, and to prepare the next generation of leaders for bigger responsibilities down the road.

Alan Chong, an associate professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, noted that this was part of the People’s Action Party’s (PAP’s) response to the watershed election in 2011, where it had received its lowest vote share since Independence, at 60.1 per cent.

“We need younger leaders who can connect to the strains in both our economy and society today, in an age of accelerated globalisation,” Dr Chong said.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh pointed out that the confirmation of both Mr Tan and Mr Wong as full ministers is “a vote of confidence” – that they are able to manage the demands of these posts and, potentially, other portfolios in Government.

“Making them full ministers also means that they will be expected to anchor their electoral teams in their Group Representation Constituencies.”

Law associate professor Eugene Tan of the Singapore Management University said both Mr Tan and Mr Wong have been “thrown into the deep end”, managing ministries that deal with “very major concerns”.

“But both have brought new ideas to the table, and shown a willingness to engage with various stakeholders. They have also spoken very frankly on issues that involve having to make some trade-offs,” he added.

Dr Koh added that Mr Tan manages a “very complex and politicised” portfolio. “There are no ‘right’ answers but tensions to balance off in trying to trim foreign workforce growth, increase labour productivity and ensure business sustainability,” she said.

On his part, Mr Wong’s efforts have contributed to a “booming arts scene in Singapore”, said Nominated Member of Parliament Tan Su Shan.

PM Lee commended Mr Tan and Mr Wong for having “performed well since taking office, and mastered their portfolios”.

“They have also worked hard on the ground, winning the respect and trust of Singaporeans,” he said.

For Singapore’s next generation of leaders to succeed, striking the right balance between being a technocrat and walking the ground is key, said the experts.

“Public policy has become a lot more complex today,” explained Prof Tan.

“It’s important to be able to connect the head and the heart, to persuade and give people that sort of assurance which they won’t take as empty promises.”

Yesterday’s changes also saw PAP backbencher Dr Lam Pin Min being pushed to the front bench. He will be Minister of State for Health on Aug 1.

“It will be interesting to see if this becomes a practice which allows backbenchers to see this as a way to progress in their political careers,” noted Dr Koh.