

Cabinet changes: Two women ministers in Cabinet for first time with Josephine Teo's promotion

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For the first time, Singapore will have two women ministers in the Cabinet.

Senior Minister of State Josephine Teo, who will be promoted to full minister on May 1, will join Culture, Community and Youth Minister Grace Fu as the second woman in the now 22-strong Cabinet.

Mrs Teo, 48, will be Minister in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). She will also take on a new portfolio as Second Minister for Manpower, a field not unfamiliar to the former assistant secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC).

It was the last job that Mrs Teo, who entered politics in 2006, held before she was appointed Minister of State in 2011.

Her new portfolio will have her working again with her former boss, Manpower Minister Lim Swee Say.

Mr Lim was the NTUC secretary-general during her years in the labour movement. She had also worked under him during her 10 years at the Economic Development Board, which Mr Lim headed in the 1990s.

Mrs Teo said in a Facebook post yesterday: "He has always been a generous mentor and we enjoy good chemistry. We've discussed some areas of focus and I will share more in due course."

A PMO statement said Mrs Teo will continue in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, as Second Minister, and help Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean in overseeing population matters.

MPs and women groups said her promotion brings women one step closer to having equal representation in leadership positions, including in politics.

Said Ms Fu on Facebook: "It was a matter of time before more female colleagues will join me."

She added: "This signifies yet another step forward for women in Singapore. I hope to see more women fulfilling their aspirations and taking on leadership roles, regardless of their line of work."

Said Ms Jolene Tan of the Association of Women for Action and Research: "It is important to not just remove formal barriers to equal representation, but also promote it actively."

Some believe Mrs Teo's appointment as Second Minister for Manpower could pave the way for her to helm the ministry one day.

It would be "a nice fit, given her background", said Dr Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies.

"The other route is for her to take over as secretary-general of NTUC and for (labour chief) Chan Chun Sing to get back to mainstream government work."

Senior Minister of State Josephine Teo will be promoted to full minister on May 1, 2017.