

New line-up marks next phase of political renewal

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The People's Action Party (PAP) has renewed the ranks of its top leadership, in a move that formally marks the start of Singapore's next phase of political renewal with the younger, fourth-generation (4G) leaders at the helm.

Heavyweights such as Deputy Prime Ministers Teo Chee Hean and Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure Khaw Boon Wan are no longer in the party's top decision-making body to take the PAP to the next general election.

Instead, the new central executive committee (CEC), voted in at the party's conference yesterday, is made up of (in no particular order): Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Mr K. Shanmugam, Mr Chan Chun Sing, Ms Grace Fu, Mr Gan Kim Yong, Mr Heng Swee Keat, Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Ms Indranee Rajah, Mr Ng Chee Meng, Mr Ong Ye Kung, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin and Dr Vivian Balakrishnan.

The 12 received the most votes from about 2,000 cadres who picked them from a list of 19 names.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen and Manpower Minister Josephine Teo were co-opted into the CEC as they got the 13th and 14th highest votes. The PAP did not disclose the number of votes each received.

The two new faces in the CEC are Mr Ng Chee Meng and Ms Indranee.

Others on the ballot were Communications and Information Minister S. Iswaran, National Development Minister Lawrence Wong, Social and Family Development Minister Desmond Lee, Senior Minister of State Janil Puthuchery, and Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC MP and PAP executive director Alex Yam.

The new CEC will lead the party into the next general election, for which it has "only two years left to prepare", PM Lee said.

Calling the latest CEC changes "a major transition point for the party", he said they were partly made possible by five longstanding party leaders stepping down.

PM Lee thanked the five - outgoing party chairman Mr Khaw, vice-chairman Yaacob Ibrahim, assistant secretaries-general Mr Teo and Mr Tharman and treasurer Lim Swee Say - for their contributions over the years.

"They have played vital roles in the last few CECs, they put in place plans so that PAP can remain relevant and relatable, they led the party in helping residents resolve their problems," he said in his Mandarin speech.

PM Lee Hsien Loong thanked outgoing party chairman Khaw Boon Wan, vice-chairman Yaacob Ibrahim, assistant secretaries-general Teo Chee Hean and Tharman Shanmugaratnam and treasurer Lim Swee Say for their contributions over the years.

Turning to the new line-up, which he described as a "major step forward in our political renewal", he said in his English speech that the positions they will hold in the new CEC will be decided when the committee meets in a couple of weeks. "In due course, I will follow up with changes in the Cabinet line-up."

Noting the smooth transitions of power from founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew to his successor Goh Chok Tong, and from Mr Goh to PM Lee himself, he expressed the hope that party members would give their "wholehearted support to the new CEC and our 4G leaders".

The 4G team, he said, has been in the Cabinet for several years, and been tested in several portfolios.

"It is a team of able men and women, with a good combination of skills among them. They are gaining experience, willing to serve and, most importantly, with their hearts in the right place.

"I can see them gelling as a team, and am confident they have what it takes to lead Singapore," he said.

Who among them will be appointed to the positions of first and second assistant secretary-general (ASG), vacated by Mr Teo and Mr Tharman respectively, will be closely watched. These deputy chief roles will be the strongest indicator of who could succeed PM Lee.

There is talk among the cadres that Mr Chan, as well as Mr Shanmugam or Mr Heng, will occupy the positions.

Institute of Policy Studies deputy director Gillian Koh said the PAP is still "a half-step away" from seeing a new leader.

She believes Mr Shanmugam would take one of the two spots as "one of the deputy prime ministers is traditionally the security czar, and it's clear the Home Affairs and Law Minister is the one with that experience".

She added: "With one more ASG spot left, the potential PM would be clearly known, since the current PM has said Singapore is not ready for a non-Chinese leader. But if the CEC sets out three deputies, then it shows the 4G corpus has yet to make up its mind on who to give their full support."