

2 new faces in the Cabinet

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Two first-term politicians - who were part of the group dubbed the "fabulous five" in last year's General Election (GE) - will be promoted to Acting Ministers in the Cabinet reshuffle announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday, as political analysts noted the quickening pace of leadership renewal.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin and Mr Lawrence Wong will join Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Chan Chun Sing and Education Minister Heng Swee Keat in helming a ministry each.

The four - along with National Trades Union Congress Deputy Secretary-General Ong Ye Kung who was not elected - were identified as new faces to watch during the GE last year.

From today, Mr Tan will be Acting Minister for Manpower, while Mr Wong will be appointed as Acting Minister for the new Ministry for Culture, Community and Youth with effect from Nov 1.

In response to media queries, Mr Lee noted that the new ministers "have performed well". He said: "They plunged deep in right from the start and have tackled their tasks energetically and imaginatively.

"They have learnt quickly and become more confident and familiar with the issues."

Adding that he expects "to do further reshuffles from time to time during this term", Mr Lee said: "The ministers have settled down and gained experience in their new roles. Enough time has passed for me to assess their performance and abilities. It is timely to adjust the Cabinet line-up to better address our priorities and challenges."

Singapore Management University (SMU) law lecturer Eugene Tan felt that the latest political appointments "suggest that the pace of (leadership) renewal has quickened".

Still, he noted that this was not surprising, given that the men were among those identified during the GE last year as being slated for high political office.

Concurring, Institute of Policy Studies Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh said the announcements were "absolutely no surprise; it's about time".

Dr Koh added: There is also some urgency to ensure that the political succession takes place."

She noted that Mr Lee had said in 2010 that he envisaged handing over to a fourth-generation leadership by 2020.

Citing the Bukit Brown episode - where Mr Tan had spearheaded the Government's engagement efforts - SMU political science professor Bridget Welsh said: "For the new people, it's going to be a baptism of fire because they all have very limited experience (in their fields), and not all the experiences have been successful ones."

When contacted by TODAY, Mr Tan said of his new appointment: "One is never ever fully ready for anything, but we equip ourselves as best we can. Always observing, listening and learning ... and reflecting. When the time comes and the call is sounded, you step forward and serve to the best of your ability."

Mr Wong said on his Facebook page that he was excited about the opportunity to engage and work with Singaporeans.

Noting that his new ministry's mission was to build cohesion and a strong sense of national identity, he said: "In the coming months, I look forward to meeting with many of you - our young people, our arts and sports groups, as well as our civic and community volunteers - to get your ideas and views on how we can keep Singapore strong."