

## **An eclectic mix ...**

***Tan Weizhen and Sumita Sreedharan***

***Today***, 3 February 2012

A new slate of nine Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs) was unveiled yesterday, and its eclectic mix - among others, a political commentator, a former journalist, a banking high-flyer and a managing director of an international retail group - is a reflection of the increasingly diverse society, political observers noted.

According to a statement released yesterday by the Clerk of Parliament, the nine were chosen from 47 valid applications. There were 34 individual applications and 16 names submitted by the eight functional groups including business and industry, tertiary education and media.

The NMPs were chosen by a Special Select Committee chaired by Speaker of Parliament Michael Palmer.

Said Mr Palmer: "We wanted NMPs who could bring their specialised knowledge and experience to add to the depth and breadth of the debates in Parliament.

"This will help Singapore as we address together key challenges ahead."

Leader of the House Ng Eng Hen, who is also on the committee, said the final slate "was to ensure the widest representation possible, so that the varied interests and needs of different groups of Singaporeans would be heard in Parliament".

Among the new NMPs, Mr Teo Siong Seng has been re-appointed for a second term. Some such as Mr Nicholas Fang and Assistant Professor Eugene Tan are familiar names, having written regularly for this newspaper. Mr Fang, the youngest among the nine, is also the only NMP selected from among the individual applications.

This time, the committee had added one more functional group - the civic and people sector. Ms Faizah Jamal, a Nature Society Singapore member and an adjunct lecturer in environment education at Republic Polytechnic, was selected from this new group.

For both Ms Faizah and Asst Prof Tan, education is an issue close to their hearts. Ms Faizah said that, as an NMP, she will focus on nature and heritage education.

Asst Prof Tan said he will raise issues on pre-school, life-long and tertiary education.

Mr Ramasamy Dhinakaran, managing director of the Jay Gee Melwani Group of Companies, and Mr Teo said they will represent the interests of the business community.

Mr Dhinakaran highlighted his experience in corporate and charity governance, while Mr Teo said he will speak on issues concerning small and medium enterprises.

Mr Teo, who is also president of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI), added that he will also voice out the concerns of SCCCI members.

Trade unionist Mary Liew told Today she will focus on the plight of low-wage workers, the elderly and women.

Mr Laurence Lien said he wants to focus on "social realities on the ground" and speak up on "community empowerment and ownership".

For Mr Fang, he will focus on issues on sports and the media, in particular developing a sporting culture. Theatre actress Janice Koh said she hopes to be an advocate for the arts and cultural community and act as a "bridge between the cultural sectors and policy makers".

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noted the strong presence of business representatives.

Said Dr Koh: "It is going to be challenging going forward, in terms of the economy. There is uncertainty in the global environment, citizens will experience slower growth. Yes, the business voice requires as much representation as possible."

Nevertheless, former NMP Zulkifli Baharudin said: "I do not think we should judge them based on their careers but based on their performance in Parliament."

Sociologist and former NMP Paulin Straughan, who was unsuccessful in her bid for a second term, said: "It is definitely a good thing that more people are stepping forward and I hope this trend will continue. The last election showed that Singaporeans want to be considered, want their views to be considered... so it is important for more Singaporeans to step forward."

The new batch of NMPs will be sworn in at the next sitting of Parliament on Feb 14.