

Leadership renewal ‘picks up pace’ with Cabinet changes; High number of senior appointments reflects growing complexity of governance, say analysts

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With effect from Monday, Mrs Josephine Teo and Mr Desmond Lee will join the ranks of full ministers in the Cabinet, following the latest round of changes announced by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) yesterday.

For the first time, Singapore will have two female full ministers, the other being Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu.

Both Mrs Teo, 48, and Mr Lee, 40, who are currently Senior Ministers of State, will be promoted to Ministers in the Prime Minister’s Office.

Leaving the Ministry of Transport (MOT), Mrs Teo will continue to oversee population matters, while retaining her Manpower and Foreign Affairs portfolios in the role of Second Minister. Mr Lee will remain in the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of National Development as a Second Minister. Six other officeholders were also promoted, including four who will be appointed as Senior Ministers of State.

With the latest appointments, the Cabinet will have 22 full Ministers and nine Senior Ministers of State — the highest to date — and a relatively large number of Ministers in the PMO and Second Ministers. These reflected the urgency of leadership renewal as much as the growing complexity of governance, political analysts said.

Apart from Mrs Teo and Mr Lee, labour chief Chan Chun Sing is also a Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office.

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said: “It also reflects the imperative for the younger leadership to have a broader perspective and the inter-ministerial approach needed to deal with the major challenges and future planning.”

Agreeing, Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director at the Institute of Policy Studies, pointed out that many cross-cutting issues are dealt with at the PMO. She said: “Given that there are Second Ministers in seven ministries, and two ministries where there are two Ministers, there seems to be this willingness to let the younger set (of leaders) be mentored more directly but also to expose them to more areas of public policy to speed up their learning.”

Both Dr Koh and S Rajaratnam School of International Studies analyst Alan Chong described the latest round of Cabinet changes as “cautious”. Dr Chong said: “The Cabinet still consists of the usual heavyweights and trusted hands.”

However, Assoc Prof Tan felt that leadership renewal was at “an accelerated pace”. “The Government and politics or tomorrow will be quantitatively different from today, so there is never ever going to be adequate preparation. The task is to ensure the fourth generation gel as a team and are resilient and adaptable,” he said.

In a Facebook post yesterday, Mrs Teo said she was grateful to the people who have stood by her and humbled “by the enormity of the task” ahead. “There are interesting parallels between my current work in MOT and new role in MOM (Ministry of Manpower). We are all about adapting to disruption through better skills and better jobs, and always seeking brighter prospects for Singaporeans,” she said.

Congratulating her colleague, Ms Fu said: “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.”

Speaking to TODAY, Mr Lee said he was humbled by his promotion. He said he will be focusing on three immediate areas: Security threats, partnering with unions and businesses in the built environment sector and working on local biodiversity and the environment.

Among the others who were promoted included Dr Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, who will be appointed Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Education and Social and Family Development). Adding that he was “deeply grateful” for the promotion, he said: “My work requires a great deal of community involvement. Therefore, I am sincerely appreciative of the support, suggestions and feedback given during various engagement platforms.”

Mr Amrin Amin will be appointed as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Health (MOH), on top of his current portfolio in the Ministry of Home Affairs. He said: “There are many pressing issues to deal with at MOH such as the ongoing fight against diabetes and managing the rising healthcare needs of our ageing population. I look forward to addressing health matters and working closely with the community.”

The PMO also announced that Minister of State (Manpower) Teo Ser Luck will be leaving political office on June 30, to return to the private sector. He will remain a Member of Parliament for Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC.