

No need for a Senior Minister

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The absence of a Senior Minister appointment in the latest Cabinet line-up may signify Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's need — in the words of one People's Action Party (PAP) Member of Parliament — to be "his own man" given the current political climate.

But the value of experience and the need for continuity in times of leadership transition are some reasons the PAP MPs, as well as a political observer, gave as to why Singapore might not see the last of the role.

Most, however, are unequivocal that there is no need for a guiding hand in a Senior Minister appointment in the latest Cabinet line-up, which will be sworn in tomorrow.

In the previous Cabinet, there were two SMs: Mr Goh Chok Tong and Professor S Jayakumar, who have both stood down.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noted that Mr Lee wanted to give his team a clean slate and to get younger members to "pull their weight and even to the extent of making them double-hat if need be".

"That is his motivation. There may be different motivations, imperatives and strategies on how to mobilise the talents and skills of the members of his team," she said.

Some observers noted that Mr Lee, 59, is the oldest member of the new Cabinet and this logically rules out any SM appointment, which has traditionally been accorded to ministers who have served the Government longer than the incumbent Prime Minister.

Dr Koh added that one need for senior leaders to remain in Cabinet in the role of SMs was so that they could access "strategic information", advise the Cabinet and use their networks to develop the country's interests.

To Ang Mo Kio Group Representation Constituency MP Inderjit Singh, it is precisely the fast pace of renewal that might see Mr Lee take on the role of a Senior Minister come 2020 — a deadline Mr Lee has set himself to hand over to the fourth generation leadership.

"PM had a long time ... (with) MM and SM to help him, but now, the rate at which we would have to renew the leadership, a new incoming PM would not have had the amount of training that the PM had and at that point in time, the new PM might require some help," he said.

And despite the desire of the current generation for change, Mountbatten MP Lim Biow Chuan felt it would be "a waste" for leaders with the stature of former Prime Ministers to leave the Cabinet given their "years of experience building up relationship with others".