

'Social, community issues increasingly important' **PM announces MCYS and MICA to be restructured; a new ministry to focus on culture, community and youth**

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In one of the Government's biggest moves in recent years, two existing ministries will be restructured and a new ministry will be created to focus on culture, community and youth.

The rationale is to bring social and community issues, as well as the need to effectively engage the public, into sharper focus, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday in a press statement.

"Singapore is in a new phase of development. Social and community issues are increasingly important in our shared home," Mr Lee added.

From November, the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) will be overseen by three ministries.

A new ministry, the Ministry for Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) - to be headed by Mr Lawrence Wong, who will be appointed Acting Minister - will take charge of strengthening community bonds and the development of sports, arts and heritage.

The MCYS will be renamed the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), while MICA will be renamed the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI).

Outlining three priorities, Mr Lee said Singapore needs to strengthen its families and enhance its social safety nets for the needy. The Republic also needs to foster the arts and sports and build social capital through volunteerism and engage youths.

And in the age of social media and swift technological progress, the Government needs to improve public communications and engagement to reach out more effectively to an "increasingly diverse society", said Mr Lee.

In response to media queries, Mr Lee reiterated that all three ministries - the MCCY, MSF and MCI - "will have to break new ground, try fresh approaches and keep up with rapidly changing conditions and needs".

A notable result of the restructuring is the omission of "sports" and "arts" from the names of the new ministries, which have sparked concerns among some in the sports and arts communities whom TODAY spoke to.

But Mr Lee noted: "The name 'Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth' does not identify all these areas explicitly, but that is only to keep the ministry name reasonably concise."

Members of Parliament felt that the onus will also lie with the Minister-designate for the MCCY to ensure sports and the arts remain priorities.

Marine Parade Group Representation Constituency Member of Parliament Seah Kian Peng, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Community Development, Youth and Sports, said: "I'm quite sure those in the sports fraternity will not be left out. If they are, I will make a lot of noise. Like many others, I feel sports is a great way to bring people

together."

Mr Baey Yam Keng, deputy chairman of the GPC for Information, Communications and the Arts, noted that there was public discussion when the word "culture" was dropped during ministry restructuring exercises in the past. "The name is of course important, but I think we need to get the substance of the ministry," he said, adding that it was up to the new Minister to address the concerns of some parties.

On his Facebook page yesterday, Mr Wong said that Singapore stands to benefit from a more holistic approach to culture and the arts, community engagement, and sports and youth affairs. He added that having a single ministry serving "these different spheres of public life will encourage synergies that benefit one and all".

National Family Council chairman Lim Soon Hock felt that the Government was giving "greater focus on family in light of challenges like the declining fertility rate, later marriages, the bearing of children at a later age and rising divorce rates".

Political analysts TODAY spoke to felt that events during last year's General Election (GE) had a bearing on the Government's moves.

Institute of Policy Studies Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh felt that the mandate of the MCI would allow the Government to boost its capacity to deal with public engagement, given the general sentiment in the run-up to the GE that the authorities needed to connect better with the public.

Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan felt the greater prominence given to family and social issues could be due in part to key issues that emerged from the GE. "While last year's General Election was not totally about social issues, they were a key issue," said the Nominated Member of Parliament.