

## Three Ministers to retire from Cabinet, but will stay on as MPs

**Faris Mokhtar**

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With a combined experience of close to 60 years in the Cabinet, three long-serving Ministers, Mr Lim Hng Kiang, Mr Lim Swee Say and Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, will be stepping down from their posts on May 1.

Mr Lim Hng Kiang, 64, Minister for Trade and Industry (Trade), is making way for Mr Chan Chun Sing, while Manpower Minister Lim Swee Say, 63, will be succeeded by Mrs Josephine Teo. The position of Minister for Communications and Information held by Dr Yaacob, 62, will be going to Mr S Iswaran.

Having spent 24 years as a full Minister, Mr Lim Hng Kiang is presently the second longest-serving member in the Cabinet behind Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Mr Lim entered politics after the 1991 General Election and in 1994, became Acting Minister for National Development before being appointed as a full Minister a year later. Between 1999 and 2003, he served as Health Minister.

His longest tenure was in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), where he has served as Minister since 2004.

In 2015, he co-led MTI together with Mr Iswaran, who was appointed Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) due to the ministry's expanded work scope.

At MTI, Mr Lim oversaw the implementation of the Industry Transformation Maps for 23 sectors, to drive changes to the economy and to provide training and career pathways for workers, among others.

He is also serving now as Member Of Parliament (MP) of West Coast GRC.

In a media statement on Tuesday (April 24), MTI announced that Mr Lim will be appointed as Special Adviser to the ministry with effect from May 1.

He will "provide advice on MTI's economic strategies to grow Singapore's capabilities and international economic space", among other consultative tasks, the ministry said.

### **'Tremendous confidence' in successor: Lim Swee Say**

For Manpower Minister Lim Swee Say, he is assured that he is leaving the ministry in the good hands of his successor, Second Manpower Minister Josephine Teo. He described her as a "bright, capable and passionate" fourth-generation leader in whom he has "tremendous confidence".

In an email response to TODAY, Mr Lim Swee Say said that "it has been a privilege" for him to serve in the Cabinet for the past 18 years, and that it is important for the Cabinet to renew itself.

Since he was elected MP in the 1997 General Election, Mr Lim has taken up various ministerial positions, including being the Environment Minister and Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

In 2007, he was appointed secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). After eight years in that role, he left the labour movement and then took office as Manpower Minister.

At the Manpower Ministry, Mr Lim — who is also MP for East Coast GRC — oversaw the launch of the Government's Adapt and Grow initiative to support jobseekers during a period of rising retrenchments and unemployment.

Under this, schemes such as the Career Support Programme were introduced, where the Government foots part of the wage bill of employers who hire and train retrenched mid-level employees.

Asked what his immediate plans are after his retirement, Mr Lim said that he would like to spend more time with his family and with residents in Bedok, where he is also the grassroots adviser.

He has two children and his wife, formerly a software engineer and computer sales manager, gave up her career in 1991 to be a homemaker.

### **Embracing the good and the bad: Yaacob Ibrahim**

Looking back at his 16 years in Cabinet "with a bit of pride and a lot of gratitude", Dr Yaacob said in a farewell video message posted on Facebook that his decision to join politics was a "continuation of the work I have been doing in community organisations".

From his school days, he has been involved in the Association of Muslim Professionals, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and the Nature Society (Singapore), for instance.

Dr Yaacob, a father-of-two who has been in politics since the 1997 General Election, was appointed Minister of State for Community Development and Sports in 2001 before being promoted to Minister for Community Development and Sports two years later.

He went on to become Environment and Water Resources Minister in 2004 and then Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts in 2011.

With the restructuring of ministries in 2012, Dr Yaacob became the Minister for Communications and Information.

In 2015, he was appointed Minister-in-charge of Cyber Security and oversaw the set-up of the new Cyber Security Agency and the passing of a landmark Cybersecurity Bill to fortify Singapore's essential services against cyber-attacks.

He is also the Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, a post he has held since 2002.

Not shying away from talking about how his time in Cabinet was also marred by controversies, Dr Yaacob, who is also MP for Jalan Besar GRC, described these as "incidents that I wished had never happened".

In 2010, he was panned for his comments about floods in Orchard Road after calling it a "freak event" that happened once every 50 years.

Last year, the naming of the revamped World War II gallery space at the Former Ford Factory in Bukit Timah as "Syonan Gallery: War and Its Legacies" also caused a furore.

Following public outcry that the name "Syonan" evokes deep pain and legitimises the Japanese Occupation, it was renamed "Surviving the Japanese Occupation: War and Its Legacies".

Though Dr Yaacob had apologised over this, he said in his farewell message that he wished "we had been more sensitive to the concerns of our older generation".

"Yet arising from all these episodes are not regrets, but an appreciation for those who worked with me to overcome these challenges so that Singapore continues to be a place we are all proud to call home," Dr Yaacob said.

### **Loss of senior leaders part of the process: analysts**

Indeed, through observing the work of senior leaders and other experiences, their colleagues would have gained some knowhow for the time when they have to slip into their shoes.

Political observers also noted that the three outgoing ministers have almost 60 years of combined experience in the Cabinet.

Dr Gillian Koh, deputy director for research at the Institute of Policy Studies, said that given the "deliberate process of leadership successions", the senior Cabinet Ministers would have guided their successors.

"It is not a complete loss in the sense that the (seniors) have passed the knowledge and replicated themselves through the (juniors). They have ensured, in a step-by-step approach, that there are enough talents to pass the baton," she added.

Associate Professor Terence Lee from Murdoch University, who researches on Singapore and Malaysia politics, said that while "there will always be loss of knowledge and experience when old leaders retire", this is "to be expected in any society, even more so for a society that has Confucian values embedded within".

"I'm sure they all could have stayed on a little more, but their presence would impact on political transitional arrangements," he said.