

4G minister in spotlight with new Cabinet reshuffle

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They will helm 10 of 16 ministries after Cabinet reshuffle; no clear leader for PM, say political analysts

Mr Chan Chun Sing has been moved to the Trade and Industry Ministry (MTI).

In wide-ranging changes to the Cabinet announced yesterday, two other ministers touted as frontrunners for PM also received new appointments.

Mr Ong Ye Kung will now be the sole Minister of Education, while giving up his role as Second Minister for Defence.

He previously shared the education portfolio with Mr Ng Chee Meng, who will move to the Prime Minister's Office.

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat will assist Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on National Research Foundation matters, taking over from Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

Commenting on the Cabinet reshuffle, which saw changes in all but one ministry, PM Lee said the leadership transition is "well underway".

He wrote in a Facebook post yesterday: "I have decided to stretch the younger ones, giving many of them two ministries and additional responsibilities.

"The younger ministers will progressively take over more responsibility for governing Singapore... The leadership transition taking place in the next few years is well underway."

Fourth-generation leaders will helm 10 of the 16 ministries, and there will be three women ministers, the most ever.

Political analysts did not think the changes have given any of the three frontrunners a clear lead, but some say Mr Chan may have gained a slight edge.

Chan Chun Sing

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said: "Looking at the changes today, I won't be surprised if he has a slight edge."

He noted Mr Chan's wide-ranging portfolio thus far, which includes his People's Association and National Trades Union Congress appointments, as well as being "the minister in charge of civil service".

National University of Singapore Associate Professor Tan Ern Ser said: "I think we still have three frontrunners, but I can see Mr Chan forging ahead... He has been given another key ministry... This further consolidates his position."

Institute of Policy Studies deputy director Gillian Koh said: "It is significant that Mr Chan has been moved back into government and into the MTI portfolio, which is certainly a ministry that any potential PM should spend time in."

SIM Global Education's comparative politics researcher Felix Tan said: "It's definitely a test for Chan Chun Sing, it will be different from his previous portfolios, and this is an important area in which he can show what he is capable of."

Ong Ye Kung

Associate Professor Eugene Tan said that with Singapore moving to a knowledge-based economy, Mr Ong staying put in education does not mean that he has fallen behind.

Dr Koh said Mr Ong will remain in contention if he gets another major portfolio in the next Cabinet reshuffle.

Heng Swee Keat

Prof Tan of NUS said: "MOF remains a key portfolio. Budget 2018 can be seen as a road map for Singapore going forward. (Mr Heng's) portfolio is critical for our current and future economy and society. I would argue he is still in the running for PM."

Dr Tan of SIM also thinks Mr Heng remains firmly in the running.

He said: "(Mr Heng) has provided much stability and contributed a lot to the portfolio and any changes would be a loss."

Noting no clear frontrunner for PM had emerged, Dr Mustafa Izzuddin, a research fellow at the Iseas-Yusof Ishak Institute, said: "I don't think that was the main intention of this reshuffle. It was to put together a team rather than choose the leader of the team."