



Why the changes, and why now?

The upcoming Cabinet reshuffle on May 15 comes earlier in the Government's term than normal, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday. Below are his explanations for the various movements.

On Mr Heng Swee Keat relinquishing Finance:



As I announced two weeks ago, Heng Swee Keat will continue as Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic Policies. He will also continue to oversee the Strategy Group within the Prime Minister's Office, which coordinates our policies and plans across the Government, as well as the National Research Foundation. As Finance Minister, Swee Keat has carried a heavy burden, especially during Covid-19 when he delivered multiple Budgets within a year.

Relinquishing Finance will free him to concentrate more on the whole-of-government economic agenda, including chairing the Future Economy Council, and incorporating the recommendations of the Emerging Stronger Taskforce into the work of the council. He will also continue to co-chair the Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC), together with PRC (People's Republic of China) Vice-Premier Han Zheng.



On moving Mr Chan Chun Sing from Trade and Industry to Education:



Chan Sing has done an excellent job getting our economy back on track, and preparing our industries and companies to respond to structural changes in the global economy. This has been a major national priority. Now I am sending him to Education, where he will build on the work of previous education ministers, to improve our education system to bring out the best in every child and student, and develop young Singaporeans for the future. Nurturing people is quite different from growing the economy or mobilising unions. I look forward to Chun Sing taking on this fresh responsibility and broadening his experience.



On moving Mr Lawrence Wong and Mr Ong Ye Kung after under a year:

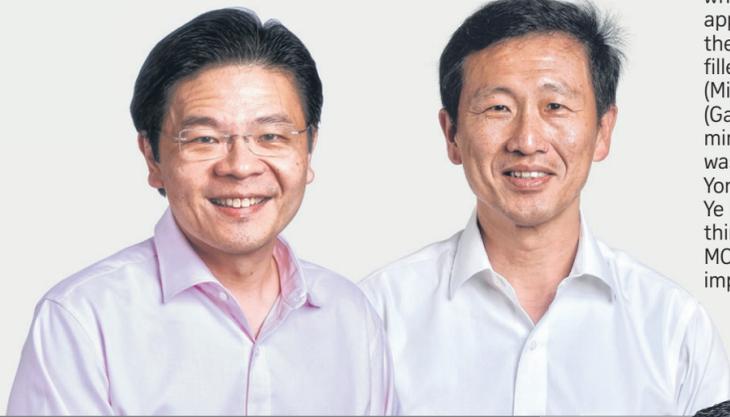


I've had to move two ministers who have only been in their appointments for quite a short time, which is Lawrence in MOE (Ministry of Education) and Ong Ye Kung in MOT (Ministry of Transport), but

unfortunately it can't be helped. I think it's a bit disruptive for the ministries; they have made contributions, they are getting into their stride, and now I have to disrupt them. But I hope that after this

adjustment, the new ministers in those two posts will be able to settle down for some time.

I appoint my ministers where they can best make a contribution. And in July, when we last made the appointments, I knew that there were major slots to be filled, especially in MOH (Ministry of Health), where (Gan) Kim Yong had been minister for some time, but I was not ready to move Kim Yong, and I was able to put Ye Kung into MOT, and I think in less than a year in MOT, he has made an impact there.



On Mr Gan Kim Yong's appointment as Trade and Industry Minister:



Kim Yong has been Health Minister for almost a decade. He has been a point man in the fight against Covid-19, co-chairing the multi-ministry task force. At MOH, he implemented many major healthcare reforms, and leaves a significant legacy of enhancements and improvements to our healthcare system. Right now, MTI (Ministry of Trade and Industry), where he is going, is a key ministry.

I hope the investors will see that we have changed from one MTI minister who has been competently discharging his responsibilities to another MTI minister who has ample experience and who we have every reason to expect will discharge his responsibilities equally well. Chun Sing didn't come to MTI with a lot of economic management experience, but he came bringing and applying his mind, having spent time with the unions, which is very valuable. Before that, he was in MSF (Ministry of Social and Family Development), but in MTI, he mastered the job and, I think, over the last year plus, especially, MTI has been rolling out schemes not just to deal with the crisis and the downturn, but to enable companies to upgrade and to prepare for the future.



And Kim Yong comes to MTI having previously been MOM (Ministry of Manpower) minister, having previously served in MTI as a junior civil servant when I was MTI minister back in 1988, I think. And in between, he had spent more than a decade - 16 years - in the private sector, which I think is a valuable experience for anybody who becomes MTI minister. So I am sure that the investors will look at this... If they don't know Kim Yong by now from the MTF (multi-ministry task force), if they read his CV, I have no reason to doubt that they will maintain full confidence in Singapore.

On appointing Mr Edwin Tong to the People's Association:



Chan Chun Sing has been in charge of PA for a while now... and I think that in Education, he is going to have his hands very full. He is also covering several other additional responsibilities, including PSD (Public Service Division), as well as party work. So I felt that it was better to spread the duties out and, in this case, I have given PA into the charge of Edwin Tong, who is in MCCY (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth), and I think there's synergy between MCCY's work and PA's work.



On not changing Mr Desmond Lee's portfolio:



I think if you talk to Desmond Lee, he already has more responsibilities than he needs. He's not just minister in MND (Ministry of National Development), but he is also second minister in MSF (Ministry of Social and Family Development) and doing quite intensive outreach in his MSF role. I do have many ideas (on) what I can load Desmond with, but I've decided to hold off for now.



On Mr S. Iswaran moving to Transport:



At MCI (Ministry of Communications and Information), he has significantly improved the Government's public communications and sense-making capabilities, and helped us understand and respond to citizens' views and concerns. He has managed major upgrades to our tech infrastructure; for example, the award of tenders and roll-out of the new 5G networks. At Transport, he will continue improving the quality, affordability and environmental sustainability of our transport system. Another important task is to maintain our status as a global air and sea hub in the post-Covid-19 world. MOT (Ministry of Transport) also deals with ongoing sensitive air space and maritime issues concerning our neighbours. Iswaran will also continue as Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations in MTI (Ministry of Trade and Industry).

On Mrs Josephine Teo handing over Manpower to Dr Tan See Leng



As Manpower Minister, Josephine was responsible for a whole range of policies, including worker safety, labour relations and retirement adequacy. Under her leadership, we achieved tripartite consensus on a 10-year roadmap to raise the re-employment age and retirement age. We also made a major expansion of the Silver Support scheme. Last year, in the unprecedented Covid-19 downturn, MOM (Ministry of Manpower) led our efforts to support local job creation and training opportunities. At the same time, MOM has been on the front line dealing with the migrant worker dormitories. Through all this, Josephine has been steadfast in working to support our lower-wage

workers and upgrade their incomes. This project is making good progress, and she will see this through even though she has gone to MCI (Ministry of Communications and Information).

Since (Dr Tan See Leng) was appointed Second Minister in MOM in July last year, he has been leading our efforts to tackle Covid-19 in the migrant worker dormitories. Now he will take on the full range of responsibilities at MOM. See Leng will also continue as Second Minister at MTI (Ministry of Trade and Industry). This will help us connect the work of the two vital economic ministries, particularly on restructuring the economy and the workforce.

