

PM Lee to stay on as Senior Minister; any major Cabinet changes will come after GE: Lawrence Wong
Singapore's next Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said a new Cabinet will be sworn in on May 15, but he will wait until after the General Election to make bigger changes to the team.

SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister after stepping down as leader of the government, but there won't be many changes to the rest of the lineup for now, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said on Tuesday (Apr 16).

Details of a Cabinet reshuffle will be announced a few days before the swearing-in ceremony on May 15, Mr Wong, Singapore's next Prime Minister, told reporters a day after the leadership handover date was announced.

"Our system works on the basis of continuity and progressive change. It has never been the case that when there is a leadership transition, all the older ministers step down at the same time," he said.

"Instead, they continue to contribute in different ways, while making room for the younger ones to step up. So I will adopt the same approach when I take over."

Mr Wong, who is also Finance Minister, said he is glad Mr Lee has agreed to stay in the Cabinet as Senior Minister. Former Prime Ministers Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong also served as Senior Ministers after stepping down.

Asked if Senior Minister Teo Chee Hean will continue in his role, Mr Wong said existing ministers will largely remain in their current portfolios, although he is in the process of speaking to each of them.

"I will also look at possible promotions as well as consider bringing in a few backbenchers to strengthen the team," Mr Wong said.

"I won't be able to bring in people from outside to join the team until the election, so for now, the broad shape of the team remains intact."

THE SEARCH FOR NEW CANDIDATES

Bigger changes to the Cabinet will likely happen only after the General Election, which must be held by November 2025, said Mr Wong.

"I'm already in the midst of looking for new candidates, especially those with potential to hold political office. So depending on the outcome of the General Election, there will be an opportunity then to renew and strengthen the team with new members," he added.

Mr Wong, 51, said one of his key priorities would be to form the best possible team to serve Singapore and Singaporeans, and he wants

to have both change and continuity.

"We should build on what we have today. We should affirm and reinforce what works well for Singapore.

"But I also want change, because we should re-examine and refresh our current approaches and be prepared to break new ground in order to adapt more effectively to a rapidly changing environment," he said.

The goal is to have a good balance between experienced ministers and new members of the team who can add fresh perspectives.

"Hopefully, when the election is called, I will be able to present a new slate of candidates with quite a number of them having the potential to hold office," he added.

ELECTION PREPARATION IS A "WORK IN PROGRESS"

While Mr Wong gave no clues about when the General Election will be held, he said preparations for it are always a work in progress.

He was responding to CNA's question on whether People's Action Party (PAP) anniversary in November will impact when he might call the GE, and whether there will be a time to rally the party.

"We have the party conference once every two years. It is an opportunity for the cadres to meet and for them to elect and vote the leadership into the CEC, and this will happen later this year," Mr Wong said.

"General Elections are a different matter," he added.

"The work to prepare for the next GE starts the day after the last election. We have to consistently tend the ground, attend to the needs of residents and strive to win over their hearts and minds.

"I tell our branch chairs and our activists this all the time, we have to do this work consistently and do this work well."

If all PAP branches do that, then there is no need to anticipate or second guess when the elections will be called, Mr Wong said.

"Because whenever the button is pressed, we will be ready for the campaign."

Mr Wong said there is a full agenda for the rest of this term of government. That includes dealing with concerns around the economy, jobs and cost of living, as well as providing assurance to seniors, families and vulnerable groups.

"We will have to start work, not just dealing with immediate concerns, but taking concrete steps towards our shared aspirations, something that we had set out to do through the Forward Singapore exercise," he said.

The Deputy Prime Minister also thanked his colleagues for placing their confidence in him and choosing him to lead the team.

Mr Wong was named leader of PAP's fourth-generation team in April 2022. In June of that year, he took on the role of Deputy Prime Minister.

"I stand on the shoulders of giants and one in particular stands out – that's Mr Lee Hsien Loong. He has done so much for Singapore, especially in the last 20 years of leading our country," he said.

Singapore has weathered many crises and enjoyed improvements in the standard of living under Mr Lee's leadership, said Mr Wong.

He added: "On behalf of all Singaporeans, I thank Mr Lee Hsien Loong for his selfless service to our country and lasting contributions to Singapore."