

Nine new Nominated MPs picked for 2½-year term

Among them are para swimmer, social entrepreneur and labour economist; two are below 30

Yasmine Yahya and Adrian Lim

A paralympian gold medallist, a social entrepreneur and a labour economist are among the nine new faces selected as Nominated MPs.

The latest crop of NMPs announced in a statement by Parliament yesterday are:

- Paralympian swimmer Yip Pin Xiu, 26;
- Labour unionist Arasu Duraisamy, 50;

- Sakae Holdings chairman Douglas Foo Peow Yong, 49;
- Singapore Chinese Orchestra executive director Ho Wee San, 49;
- Communication and technology professor Lim Sun Sun, 46;
- Inter-religious non-profit group Roses of Peace founder Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, 29;
- Social entrepreneur and Hush TeaBar founder Anthea Ong Lay Theng, 50;
- Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore president Irene Quay

- Siew Ching, 43; and
- Labour economist and associate professor Walter Theseira, 40.

The nine will replace the current NMPs, whose terms end on Sept 21 and have stepped down. The Special Select Committee which chose the NMPs had received 48 proposals.

Leader of the House Grace Fu said in a statement yesterday that the nine come with good credentials in their respective fields, and have keen interest in a

broad range of issues.

“As a group, they add to the diversity of expertise and experience in the House,” said the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

Noting that two of the NMPs – Ms Yip and Mr Abbas – are below the age of 30, Ms Fu expressed confidence that they “will enrich debate by bringing the voices of the youth to the House”.

Ms Yip, in fact, will become the youngest NMP in Parliament. Before her, the youngest NMP was beauty queen and actress Eunice

Olsen, who entered Parliament at 27 in 2004.

Speaker of Parliament Tan Chuan-Jin, who chaired the Special Select Committee, said in the statement yesterday that the nine nominees met all constitutional criteria and requirements.

“We are also confident that these passionate and committed individuals will ably represent the views within and across their communities, thus expanding and deepening perspectives shared at parliamentary debates,” he added.

The NMP scheme, introduced in 1990, is meant to provide non-partisan views in Parliament.

There can be up to nine NMPs in each term, which lasts 2½ years.

SIM Global Education associate lecturer Felix Tan said the new batch of NMPs has big shoes to fill, as the outgoing batch, which includes social entrepreneur Kuik Shiao-Yin and theatre group artistic director Kok Heng Leun, has delivered many eloquent and passionate speeches in Parliament.

“So, one would expect that this new batch could raise the bar a little

higher and produce similar passionate speeches that affect Singaporeans by and large,” he said.

He added that they could be expected to raise issues such as whether Singapore can do more to help those who are disadvantaged, entrepreneurship and the economy.

Former NMP and Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said the new slate shows an “accent on youth and the post-65 generation”.

“This continues the trend of having an emphasis on young people in the NMP appointments. It reflects the changing demographics where those born post-independence will form the growing majority of voters,” he added.

Ms Yip told The Straits Times that she is honoured to be the youngest NMP. “I hope to use my experience in the sporting arena as an athlete to make our sporting culture a more vibrant one. I also hope to bring a fresh voice for youth and speak up for equality,” she said.

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THE NINE NEW NMPs

Douglas Foo, 49

Mr Foo, who is president of the Singapore Manufacturing Federation, feels it is the right time for him to step up and play the role of NMP.

The chairman and founder of Sakae Holdings said he has learnt a lot from his years as a businessman, and that it is his duty to raise awareness about issues related to the economy.

He is also vice-chairman of the Singapore Business Federation and vice-president of the Singapore National Employers Federation.

“I hope to use this platform to reach out to businesses and spread the message about how important it is for them to take a hard look at their business models and use digital technology to innovate and prepare themselves for the future economy,” he said.



He also wants to reach out to young people and get them excited about the new economy, while also making them aware of the current challenges facing the workforce.

Anthea Ong, 50

Ms Ong is a social entrepreneur who has launched initiatives such as the Hush TeaBar, a not-for-profit social enterprise which hires deaf people, those with mental health issues or those in recovery, for workplace wellness programmes.

She has also launched initiatives like the Playground for Joy for special needs children.

As an NMP, Ms Ong said she hopes to speak up on social inclusion, mental health and volunteerism – issues which she feels are interlinked.

She sees volunteerism as a way to address the issues of both social inclusion and mental health.

“Volunteering can help dispel prejudices, challenge stereotypes and create acceptance of diversity,” she said. “It helps people who donate their time to feel more



socially connected, thus warding off loneliness and depression. How can we do more to embrace volunteering as a culture in Singapore?”

Irene Quay Siew Ching, 43

Ms Quay plans to speak up about issues such as rising healthcare costs, better management of healthcare services and support for working mothers.

She is a certified pharmacist and an assistant director in the Allied Health Office at the KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital.

She is also president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore and has served on several national bodies, including a Health Ministry committee.

“I see a huge potential for health professionals to be engaged in a team-based collaborative practice... (where they can be the) first point of contact for social, psychological, physical or speech-related disorders,” she said.

“This can in turn free up our physicians to focus on more



complex medical conditions and allow the healthcare system to extend their reach to a greater population in a financially sustainable manner.”

Arasu Duraisamy, 50

Mr Arasu has been involved with the labour movement for the past 25 years, having first joined as a union member in 1993.

Today, he is the general secretary of the Singapore Port Workers Union (SPWU) and an elected member of the NTUC Central Committee.

He plans to use his role as an NMP to champion worker issues and ensure that workers’ concerns are reflected when the Government crafts and implements policies that affect them.

He also wants to raise awareness about the importance of training.

“Coming from the port industry, where we are currently undergoing a major transition to the Tuas port, I fully understand the need for our workers to be trained so that we can keep up with changes in the



industry,” he said. “Seventy per cent of our workers are in SMEs and they may not fully understand the urgency and importance of training.”

Ho Wee San, 49

Mr Ho, who is executive director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO), hopes to be an advocate and voice for the traditional arts in Singapore.

He believes that the arts can play a role in bringing together people of different races, religions and backgrounds.

“We have strong traditional art forms in Singapore, but the key is to bring them to a more professional level and for them to be managed in a more professional way,” he said.

Mr Ho, who has been with the SCO for two decades and has served on various committees in the National Arts Council, feels that he can be a “good bridge” between arts groups and government agencies.

Sports is another area of interest. “On the one hand, we want to groom our sportsmen, but on the



other, there is a binding national policy to serve national service. I always believe there is a way to bring these two together... and to bring a better outcome,” he added.

Walter Theseira, 40

A non-partisan and objective voice on public policies – that is what Associate Professor Theseira from the Singapore University of Social Sciences hopes to bring to Parliament.

“There is a growing sense that people are not sure whether policies are being made in the best interest of as many people as possible, or whether policies increasingly favour a narrow group,” he added.

Prof Theseira, who is head of the university’s Master of Management (Urban Transportation) programme, said this is because people do not think of policies with reference to the facts, but rather with beliefs or conspiracy theories.

NMPs can provide a non-partisan voice, he said, adding that someone like himself can bring research and



evidence to the debate. Prof Theseira said he will weigh in on issues such as transportation, retirement, housing, education and the labour market.

Lim Sun Sun, 46

As an academic who has researched topics such as the social impact of technology, Professor Lim said that becoming an NMP will allow her to further contribute to the public discourse on Singapore’s transformation through technology.

The professor of communication and technology at the Singapore University of Technology and Design said industries, for one, are being reshaped by automation and artificial intelligence, and there is a need to ensure the workforce is prepared, in terms of skill sets and attitudes.

As more and more people are accessing their news through digital platforms, it is also critical that they are able to discriminate between disinformation and legitimate news, she said.



This is another area she will highlight in Parliament. She also wants to raise awareness of the need for more gender diversity in the tech industry.

Abbas Ali Mohamed Irshad, 29

Mr Mohamed Irshad, the founder and president of inter-faith group Roses of Peace, said he hopes to tackle the apathy among the youth towards religious harmony.

“Having that peace and harmony is the key to maintaining cohesion and security in Singapore. When it comes to religious harmony, it is usually the older folk who are involved and talking about it,” he added.

He also wants to highlight issues that young people face, such as the rising cost of living, which makes it difficult for them to settle down, as well as the mismatch between skills and job opportunities.

At age 29, he is the second youngest among the new batch of NMPs. He said: “People may think there is a lack of experience, but what I feel is that when it comes to



youth-related issues, it comes from the horse’s mouth. “Being a youth myself, I go through some of the challenges and pain points which they are facing.”

Yip Pin Xiu, 26

Ms Yip, a national athlete and paralympian swimmer, said she wants to champion sports in Singapore and create a better sporting culture.

“There are many benefits to sports and I hope that Singaporeans, regardless of ability, will be able to lead a more active lifestyle and reap the benefits,” she said. “We have to instil this mindset in Singaporeans from a young age so that they can make good decisions that will benefit them.”

Ms Yip, who was born with muscular dystrophy, has represented Singapore at the international level since 2005. She won Singapore’s first gold medal at an Olympic-level event, at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games. At the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games, she won both the 50m and 100m



backstroke in world record times. Ms Yip, who is currently training in Phuket, also aims to champion issues related to young people, the environment and equality.