First-time MPs among four parl secs sworn in

They have identified specific areas to focus on as part of their larger roles

BY AARON LOW

FOUR parliamentary secretaries were sworn in by President S R Nathan in a simple 15-minute ceremony at the Istana yester-
day.

Witnessed by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, four of the five appointed parliamentary secretaries — Mr Hawazi Daipi, Dr Amy Khaw, Mr Masagos Zulkifli and Teo Ser Luck — received their instruments of appo-
pointment from the President after taking their oath of alle-
giance.

Yesterday’s event was similar to the Cabinet swearing-in on Tuesday but on a much smaller scale with only about a dozen people, including the spouses of the four MPs, in attendance.

But for first-timer Mr Teo, who is the new Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development, Youth and Sports, it was a moving experience.

“I might not have shown it on my face but as I recited the oath, I felt so proud and so honoured to be given the chance to serve at the national level,” he said.

Along with Mr Teo, Mr Masagos is also a first-time political office-holder. He takes over the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education position from Mr Hawazi, who keeps his role as Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower.

Dr Khaw is Senior Parlia-
mentary Secretary for the Environ-
ment and Water Resources, and Mayor of the Southwest District.

Mr Mohamed Maliki Osman, who is overseas, will be sworn in next Monday.

Parliamentary secretaries have two other important func-
tions to play, he said.

One is that they take care of the parliamentary affairs of the ministry.

“For instance, if Bills are to be passed, it is his duty to ensure MPs understand the Bill and for him to sound out the MPs for their opinions before formal questions are tabled in the House,” he said.

Another important role is to handle the people who are most directly affected by the ministry’s policies, said Mr Chan. He cited his experience at the Health Ministry where he had to win over the traditional Chinese medicine practitioners when the ministry sought to pass a Bill requiring their registration.

The role of parliamentary secretaries is a good way to test whether MPs are ready for higher political office, said poli-
tical watchers. In the current Cabinet, the only parliamentary secretaries to have risen to the post of ministers are Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Infor-
mation, Communications and the Arts, and Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources.

But Singapore Management University assistant professor Eugene Tan said parliamentary secretaries should not be looked upon as people who would not make it to higher office.

Said Dr Tan: “Given the emphasis on meritocracy and the constant quest for talent within the system, a parliamentary sec-
retary can expect to be promot-
ed to MOS and beyond.”

But for Mr Masagos, higher office was not on his mind yester-
day. “Right now, I am just proud that PM had given me a function in Government to per-
form and as always I will do my best.”

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