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**Date: 14 January 2021**

**Headline: Low wage workers, sustainability and the youth among issues NMP candidates hope to raise in Parliament**

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Parliament House, Singapore. (Photo: Hanidah Amin)

Low-wage workers will be among the priority issues raised in Parliament, pledged several candidates of the new cohort of Nominated Members of Parliament (NMPs).

The Office of the Clerk of Parliament announced the names of the nine new NMPs on Thursday (Jan 14). All nine are first-time NMPs, including labour union representative Abdul Samad Abdul Wahab, former national swimmer Mark Chay and conservation scientist Professor Koh Lian Pin.

Leader of the House Indranee Rajah said that the selected entrants had distinguished themselves through their contributions to society or in their respective fields, adding that she hopes their specialised knowledge would "add to the depth and breadth of the debates in Parliament".

National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) vice-president Abdul Samad Abdul Wahab told CNA that as a worker himself, he hopes to speak for the issues, concerns and aspirations of others like him.

Mr Abdul Samad, who is also General Secretary of the Union of Power and Gas Employees, added that he also hopes to champion the expansion of the progressive wage model - which is currently limited to the security, landscape and cleaning industries - to all sectors.

More needs to be done to appreciate the contributions of older workers, he said, adding that he will ask how the Government can help ensure that they remain employed.

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In a statement, NTUC noted that Mr Abdul Samad will also focus on raising key topics, such as strengthening the Singaporean core within the workforce, as well as providing middle-income sandwiched workers with employment and training support, and helping them cope with the cost of living.



National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) vice-president Abdul Samad Abdul Wahab wants to speak for the issues, concerns and aspirations of workers. (Photo: Abdul Samad Abdul Wahab)

Echoing similar sentiments, chief executive of security firm TwinRock Global Raj Joshua Thomas said he will also highlight the needs of lower wage workers in Parliament.

“I hope to raise issues with regards to how industry transformation will impact lower wage workers and how we can ensure that as we transform and grow, these workers get a fair share of the pie,” said Mr Thomas, who is also president of Security Association Singapore.

The lawyer also added that he is interested to raise the profile and reputation of such jobs, and redesign them to encourage more Singaporeans to take them up.

One issue that economist Professor Hoon Hian Teck hopes to talk about is that of unemployment insurance.

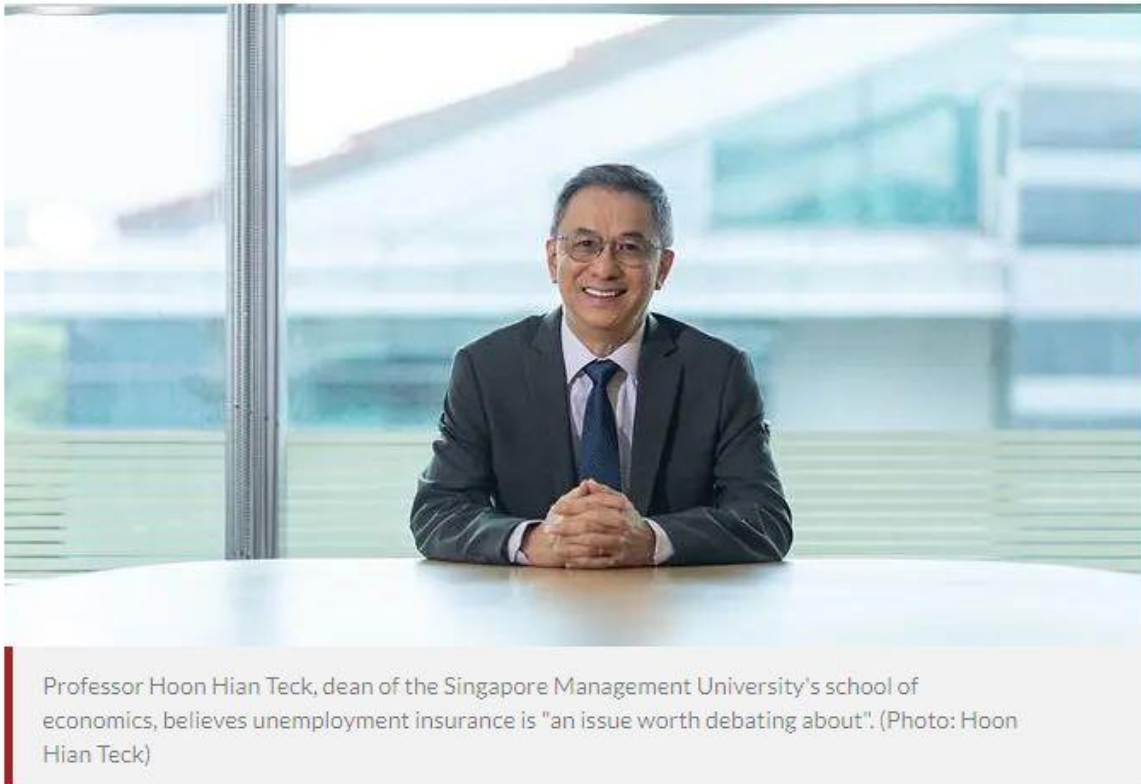
Professor Hoon, who is dean of the Singapore Management University’s School of Economics, said previously there has been little need to consider this as jobs lost due to structural changes were “more than compensated for” by new openings.

“However, with slower growth and greater churn in the labour market, it might be timely to look holistically at whether a national unemployment insurance scheme forms an integral part of an optimal social insurance system,” he said, describing such unemployment benefits as “an issue worth debating”.

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#### **SUSTAINABILITY, YOUTHS AND SMES**

Other NMPs highlighted issues such as sustainability, youths, sports, support for local small- and medium-enterprises and maintaining the public's trust in the criminal justice system.

Guocoland group managing director Cheng Hsing Yao said his priority would be to "gather feedback and formulate how to contribute constructively towards Singapore's future policies and endeavour".

He hopes to tackle issues of sustainability and liveability in Singapore, and would like to see stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors.



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Guocoland group managing director Mr Cheng Hsing Yao hopes to tackle issues of sustainability and liveability in Singapore, and would like to see stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors. (Photo: Cheng Hsing Yao)

On being appointed, he said: “I feel very honoured and also a strong sense of mission. Especially when Singapore and the world are still dealing with the challenges of COVID-19, there is a lot of work and ingenuity the society needs to pull together to make Singapore stronger.”

Conservation scientist Professor Koh Lian Pin said he wants to foster a “purposeful and constructive” civil society for nature conservation, climate solutions and sustainability efforts in Singapore.

“I believe I can contribute by providing science-based perspectives to help inform discussions and decisions,” he said.

Championing for the youths will be a priority for Khoo Teck Puat Hospital orthodontic registrar Dr Shahira Abdullah, as she cited her work with the Mendaki Club, the Singapore Youth Action Plan and the National Youth Council as examples.

“What I’ve realised is that youths are very curious and have a lot to say. With easy access to information and social media, they tend to pick up on causes they feel very strongly about and want to speak about.

“As a youth, who has been speaking to them, I hope I can bring up these issues in Parliament and hopefully provide an additional avenue for them to be heard and hopefully bring about constructive conversations and actions,” she said, adding that she wants to see more inclusivity and diversity in the community.

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Orthodontist Shahira Abdullah, a member of the National Youth Council, hopes to represent the views and opinions of the youths and the Malay-Muslim community in Parliament. (Photo: Shahira Abdullah)

SISTIC chairman Janet Ang, who is on the Council for Board Diversity, said that she was “very humbled and honoured” to be appointed as an NMP, adding that she felt a “weight of responsibility”.

The deputy chairman of the Singapore Business Federation Foundation hopes to become a voice for small- and medium- enterprises and the business community at large. She added that she would like to help them through the economic crisis caused by the pandemic and support them in their transformation efforts.

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SISTIC Chairman Janet Ang wants to be a voice for the business community. (Photo: Janet Ang)

Apart from low-wage workers, Mr Thomas added that it is “essential” to maintain Singaporeans’ “trust and faith” in the criminal justice system, which includes ensuring broad access to legal representation for people of “lesser means”.

Global Esports Federation secretariat director Mark Chay, who was previously a national swimmer, said that he feels “happy” and “excited” to be appointed.

“I’m happy to be able to contribute and raise some issues that will perhaps be important to the sports and fitness industry,” he said, adding that his key priority as NMP would be to use sports as a vehicle for social change and help Singaporeans become more resilient through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nine first-time NMPs are:

- SP Group principal technical officer Mr Abdul Samad Abdul Wahab
- SISTIC chairman Ms Janet Ang
- Global Esports Federation secretariat director Mr Mark Chay
- Guocoland group managing director Mr Cheng Hsing Yao
- Singapore Management University school of economics dean Professor Hoon Hian Teck
- National University of Singapore conservation scientist Professor Koh Lian Pin
- Lawyer Mr Joshua Thomas Raj
- Khoo Teck Puat Hospital orthodontic registrar Dr Shahira Abdullah
- Thomson Breast Centre surgeon Dr Tan Yia Swam

The selected nine will take their oath at the next sitting of Parliament in February.

Source: CNA/cc(ta)