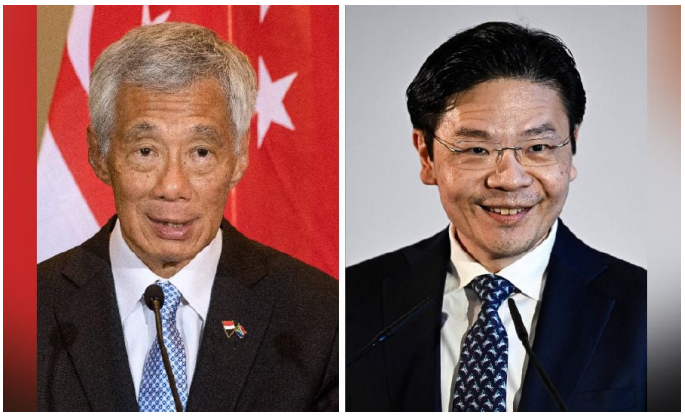
NEW STRAITS TIMES

Singapore to swear in Lawrence Wong as new prime minister

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Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (left) will hand over powers to Lawrence Wong. - AFP PIC

SINGAPORE: Singapore will swear in Lawrence Wong on Wednesday as the city-state's new prime minister, as Lee Hsien Loong steps down after two decades in office.

Wong, formerly deputy prime minister, will become the second non-member of the Lee family to lead the affluent nation when he is inaugurated at 8:00 pm local time (1200 GMT).

The 51-year-old, US-educated economist is widely seen as a social media-savvy stalwart who effectively handled the Covid-19 crisis when he oversaw the government's pandemic taskforce.

"He brings a style of leadership that's more attuned to a different generation," said Mustafa Izzuddin, a political analyst with consultancy Solaris Strategies Singapore.

"The core principle of what Singapore is about will remain because it is a system that has worked for many years. But I think his style may be slightly different because he comes from a different generation."

Wong, who was also finance minister, had been selected as Lee's heir-apparent in 2022 from a new generation of lawmakers from the People's Action Party (PAP) which has ruled uninterrupted since independence in 1965.

Outgoing premier Lee's father, Lee Kuan Yew, was Singapore's first prime minister when it became a sovereign nation after a brief union with Malaysia.

The stern patriarch, who once said he preferred to be feared than loved, oversaw the transformation of Singapore from a sleepy British colonial outpost to a financial hub in a little more than 30 years.

In 1990, the elder Lee handed power to his deputy, former shipping executive Goh Chok Tong, who was initially considered a "seat-warmer" for the patriarch's son.

Goh, however, stayed on for 14 years before the younger Lee took over in 2004.

Wong, who becomes the fourth prime minister in Singapore's history, must lead the PAP to the next general elections, which are not due until November 2025 but could be called as early as this year.

In the previous election in 2020, the opposition showed its strongest performance since independence but hardly made a dent in parliament as 83 out of the 93 seats were won by the PAP.

The PAP's squeaky clean image was recently stained by scandals which saw two lawmakers resign and a minister charged with graft.

The Workers' Party, Singapore's main opposition party, has also suffered from scandals with two members resigning and its leader charged for giving false testimony before a parliamentary committee.--AFP