



## *Welcome boost for future women leaders*

**T**HERE are some formal networks in Singapore for spotting and developing leaders in business, community work and politics, but few exist specifically for women aspiring to leadership positions. So the Young Women's Leadership Connection (YWLC), officially launched recently, is a welcome platform to prepare the next generation of women to take over when the time comes. How big an impact it will make depends on how well these women are chosen, how productively they engage with one another, and how effectively they are mentored.

The majority of the first batch comes from the three universities, but tertiary

educational enrolment or graduation is no guarantee of successful leadership. Not to be overlooked are potential leaders from elsewhere in the increasingly diversified educational landscape. Leaders can emerge also from various private and non-governmental spheres as well as the public sector. The YWLC is astutely focusing on community work as a leadership source, because it requires "a heart for service". There are enough women leaders with experience very close to the top who are well placed to guide younger ones. The 17 on the mentoring roster include Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Fi-

nance and Transport, who proposed the YWLC idea two years ago. She made history last year when she became the first woman to become a Cabinet minister.

The mentors' efforts should help not only to bring more women into social work and public life, but also to boost their overall status. Singapore is middling to high in the latest Inter-Parliamentary Union ranking by percentage of women in the legislature. At 24.5 per cent, it comes in between Monaco and Lesotho in a table of 140 countries. Unlike other nations, a woman has yet to occupy the top post in Singapore, but it is a possibility not to be completely dismissed. A fair number have become chief executive officers, notably of busi-

nesses they started and built themselves. Others have climbed high in the civil service hierarchy.

They have smashed the glass ceiling, but the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women pointed out in 2007 that "patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes" still persisted in Singapore, disadvantaging women and limiting their access to leadership positions. Another challenge, especially for younger women juggling employment and family demands, is finding the time for community and public obligations. It is a more difficult road for them than for men. They need and deserve the help YWLC can provide.