A boost for women power

SUMITA SREENDHARAN
sumitas@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE — The appointments of Ms Diana Chia as president of the National Trades Union Congress and Professor Ivy Ng as chief executive of public health institution SingHealth Group — coming just weeks after a survey showed that women were under-represented in the boardrooms — were positive developments, advocates of gender equality said.

And as the two women make their mark on public life, observers noted that the private sector needs to catch up.

Speaking to TODAY, Minister of State (Community Development, Youth and Sports) Halimah Yacob described both appointments as significant and was “an opportunity for them to be role models to women and to show that as long as you are capable, you can reach the top.”

She reiterated that it must be recognised that Ms Chia and Prof Ng attained their positions based on merit. “They are capable and were assessed on those capabilities,” said Mdm Halimah.

Human rights advocate Braema Mathi added that increasingly, women are being recognised. “The talents always existed but now they are more visible and men are becoming more open to it,” she said.

According to the Board Diversity Report released in October, women made up only 6.9 per cent of board members of listed companies on the Singapore Exchange.

The study — a collaboration between BoardAgender, an outreach arm of the Singapore Council of Women’s Organisations, and the NUS Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organisations — also found that about 60 per cent of public-listed firms do not have a single woman member on their boards.

Ms Junie Foo, the co-chair of BoardAgender, said: “While we are very happy for Prof Ivy and Ms Chia, there is still more to be done.”

Ms Foo reiterated that there is “definitely more scope for women representation in politics and the boardrooms”. She added: “It is imperative for corporations and a government to comprise an appropriate mix of skills and mindsets. Women bring different views to the table and research has shown that companies with more female directors perform better financially.”

While some countries have instituted quotas for women representation, Mdm Halimah stressed that such a practice would not be in line with Singapore’s meritocratic system. Nevertheless, boards should make a conscious decision to appoint capable women. “Women want to be chosen on merit and not just to fill quotas,” said Mdm Halimah.