

# Singapore must 'defy the odds of history' to thrive: Chan Chun Sing

**Zhaki Abdullah**

**Channel NewsAsia**, 20 January 2020

SINGAPORE: Singapore must “defy the odds of history” to survive and thrive as a small city-state, said Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing on Monday (Jan 20).

The past five decades since independence in 1965 has been an “aberration” in Singapore’s history, he noted.

“If we go back a few hundred years, Singapore has never been independent,” he said, speaking at a dialogue marking the close of the Institute of Policy Studies annual Singapore Perspectives conference.

This is because without a hinterland, it was difficult for the island to survive without the external links needed for resources and markets, he said in response to a question on his long-term vision for Singapore over the next two to three decades.

Held at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre, this year's conference attracted participants ranging from academics to students, as well as opposition party members.

Unlike some other countries, Singapore’s citizenry does not share a common ancestry, race, language or religion, Mr Chan added.

As such, the country’s identity must be defined by “forward-looking” set of values such as multiculturalism, meritocracy and incorruptibility, he said.

Such values will allow Singaporeans to define their own future, without being “beholden or held ransom” by others, he stated.

When asked about the difficulties in finding suitable people to serve in politics, Mr Chan said it was important to find those with the right values.

Political leaders must not “love themselves more than they love their country”, he said.

He shared that his wife had asked him why he continued to serve in politics, despite being on the receiving end of brickbats from critics.

“I am still here because I want my children and my grandchildren and for many more generations to come and to be able to call themselves Singaporeans.”

But in order to do so, the current crop of Singaporeans must leave behind “something better” for future generations – just as previous generations had passed down their own achievements, allowing the current generation to “stand taller and see further”, he said.

“If we can continue to do that, I’m not worried about SG100,” he said, referring to the country’s 100th year of independence

“I will say that even beyond SG100, we will continue to shine.”

## **A PARLIAMENT WITHOUT POLITICAL PARTIES**

For almost an hour, Mr Chan answered questions on topics ranging from Singapore’s language policies to the independence of the electoral boundaries review committee, as well as alternative energy sources.

One question came from opposition politician Goh Meng Seng, who said he welcomed Mr Chan’s statement that the current leadership welcomed “deep-level debate” on policies.

However, the People's Power Party secretary-general noted that government agencies were not always forthcoming with the data needed to take a deeper look at policies.

In response, Mr Chan said that while data is useful, it is not a "panacea", and must be seen objectively and not through the lens of preconceived notions or confirmation bias.

"At the same time, at the end of the day, it is not data alone that will convince our people what their choices are, it is also about the trust that our people have with us. We know that without trust, nothing will work very much."

On the issue of political partisanship, entrepreneur Ibnur Rashad asked if Singapore's political system might one day evolve to become "non-partisan" and have a Parliament without political parties.

Mr Chan said that it was a good question that he himself had given thought to, and would not rule out the possibility of.

But he noted that while allowing all political candidates to stand independently might ensure a diversity of views, it may not bring about the "convergence" needed to bring people together and drive the country forward.

"Singaporeans have to decide for ourselves what kind of political culture we want."