

DPM Heng Swee Keat & SDP's Paul Tambyah discuss Electoral Boundaries Review Committee

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Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat and Singapore Democratic Party Chairman Paul Tambyah had a full and frank exchange of views over the independence of the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee on Sep. 30.

Tambyah, a professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS), was in attendance at the Singapore Bicentennial Conference, and was chosen to ask a question.

Independent civil servants and someone in the PMO

Tambyah asked: "On this occasion, as we commemorate the move from colonialism to self-determination and democracy, my question which I hinted to you earlier on, was: Is there a good reason why we don't have (an) electoral commission, which is independent of the Prime Minister's Office?"

Because the election boundaries are currently being decided by independent civil servants, but ultimately their reporting officer is somebody in the Prime Minister's Office. And this is somewhat sub-optimal in the development of a full-blown democracy."

Heng replied:

"Well, thank you Paul for the question. So, as you yourself said, the Electoral Boundaries (Review Committee) is an independent commission.

In order to do the electoral boundaries properly, you do need to look at what are the population changes, what are the demographic changes that are happening. You want expert views on that, how best to do this, and as you yourself pointed out, they are independent."

Opposition-held constituencies have not changed

Heng pointed out that the former opposition stronghold of Potong Pasir, which used to be represented by Singapore People's Party's Chiam See Tong, "remains where it is today".

Of the Workers' Party-held constituencies, Heng said: "Hougang remains exactly the same as it is, and Aljunied in the last election remained as it is today."

Heng added: "I hope that you do not doubt the independence of this commission, that they are doing what is right."

Tambyah said: "They still report to the prime minister, though."

But Heng said: "Well, so do all other policies, but unless you're saying that they have been politically motivated, but... you yourself have said they are independent."

Committee convened

On Sep. 4, the Elections Department stated that the prime minister has convened the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee.

It is unknown how long their deliberations will take, as previous committees have taken two to four months.

The committee is chaired by the secretary to the prime minister, and it will make its recommendations to the prime minister when it has completed its review.

The other members of the committee may be found [here](#).

The next general election must be held by April 2021.

Lee Kuan Yew: Be relevant and useful to the world

Besides political matters, Heng also discussed various issues of concern to Singapore, including maintaining multi-racial harmony and navigating the stormy seas of the U.S.-China trade war.

In his remarks, Heng touched upon the critical need for Singapore to keep evolving as the world around us also changes, as he quoted the late Lee Kuan Yew.

He said: "Mr Lee put it very well. He said, for Singapore to continue to survive and prosper, we need to be relevant and useful to the world."

Heng added: "How do we remain useful and relevant to the world? It is a world that is changing so rapidly that we'll need to evolve many of our systems to make our contribution to the world.

If Singapore cannot make a contribution to the world then we will be no longer relevant, and nobody will be interested in our survival and our success."

Heng also stressed the importance of the sense of unity as Singaporeans as "critical", as countries without that unity "break apart".