

Electoral boundaries committee independent, not politically motivated: Heng Swee Keat

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Straits Times, 1 October 2019

The committee that reviews electoral boundaries is independent and not politically motivated, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat said yesterday.

To do the electoral boundaries properly, population, demographic and other changes have to be looked at, and this requires the views of independent experts, said Mr Heng, who is also Finance Minister.

He was answering a question from Professor Paul Tambyah of the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the Singapore Bicentennial Conference yesterday evening.

Prof Tambyah, who is also chairman of the Singapore Democratic Party, had asked Mr Heng if there was a "good reason" that the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) was not completely independent of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

"The election boundaries currently are decided by independent civil servants, but ultimately the reporting officer is somebody in the PMO," he said.

In his response, Mr Heng said: "As you yourself pointed out, they are independent.

"So, if you look at what they have done, the constituencies, Potong Pasir remains where it is today, Hougang remains exactly the same as it is, and Aljunied in the last election remained as it is."

Potong Pasir SMC was a former opposition stronghold under Mr Chiam See Tong, while Hougang SMC and Aljunied GRC are both held by the Workers' Party.

"So, I hope you do not doubt the independence of this commission, that they are doing what is right," said Mr Heng, who is tipped to lead the ruling People's Action Party and be the next prime minister.

He also said that with the changes taking place in new housing estates, he was glad to have civil servants who are independent, could do the work independently, and among other things, "advise us on what is the best configuration".

Prof Tambyah said: "(They) still report to the Prime Minister."

Mr Heng responded: "Unless you are saying they have been politically motivated... but you yourself said they are independent!"

The exchange occurred during a dialogue with Mr Heng at the Raffles City Convention Centre yesterday evening, moderated by Ambassador-at-large Chan Heng Chee.

The Elections Department announced the formation of the EBRC on Sept 4. This is the first formal step towards a general election, which must be held by April 2021.