

Chan: I never doubt the independence of our Electoral Boundaries Review Committee

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At the Singapore Perspectives conference organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) yesterday (20 Jan), Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing said that Singapore does not need “fair-weather candidates” who join politics only when times are good.

Instead, it needs leaders who are willing to stay the course, win the trust of Singaporeans, make tough decisions and carry them out, he added. He was responding to a question about the difficulty of getting people to join politics.

“The first order of business is how do you get people with the right values in, and to the best of our efforts, we may still get it wrong,” he said. “Once they are in, how do we get them into a coherent team – that they do not love themselves more than they love the country?”

However, speaking of love, of late, PAP seems to be recruiting candidates who love grassroots women from People’s Association more. In recent times, two PAP politicians, Michael Palmer and David Ong were forced to resign because of their “personal indiscretion” involving “loving” women from the grassroots movement led by the People’s Association.

Independence of EBRC

When asked if the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) can be completely independent of the Prime Minister’s Office, Chan replied that the committee is made up of public servants with knowledge of issues such as population and demographic changes.

“I have never doubted their independence. They do their job professionally,” he said. “No matter who does the work, how it is done, you have to report to somebody and present it to be approved and issued,” he said.

In Singapore, the EBRC is appointed by the Prime Minister and chaired by the secretary to the Prime Minister. It is responsible for the drawing of polling districts and polling sites before every election, without the need for Parliamentary approval.

Under the Parliamentary Elections Act, the incumbent Prime Minister may, “from time to time, by notification in the Gazette, specify the names and boundaries of the electoral divisions of Singapore for purposes of elections under this Act”.

Many Singaporeans have questioned the independence of the EBRC. Some accused the committee of intentionally carrying out gerrymandering on behalf of the PAP, like in the cases of Cheng San GRC and Eunos GRC being redrawn into other constituencies, or SMCs such as Joo Chiat being absorbed into bigger GRCs after close electoral fights. The constant redrawing of GRCs shortly before each election has been mocked on a widespread basis on social media, satirical and sociopolitical websites, as well as in theater.

In other Commonwealth countries like Canada, Australia, UK and South Africa, they have an independent Electoral Commission, which is free from the executive and manages its own budget. They are answerable directly to Parliament.