

High standards of conduct expected of all public servants: Chan

Obtaining valuable gifts unacceptable as it undermines integrity of the Govt, he says



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High standards of conduct are expected of all public servants, said Minister-in-charge of the Public Service Chan Chun Sing on Oct 14.

In Singapore, it is not acceptable for a public servant to accept or obtain gifts from a person whom he or she has official dealings with.

Otherwise, public confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the Government would be undermined, Mr Chan added.

“This is also the ethos Singaporeans would expect of leaders in all organisations, whether private or public,” said Mr Chan, who is also Education Minister.

He was responding in Parliament, on behalf of Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, to questions raised by several MPs on the application of Section 165 of the Penal Code and its impact on the wider public service.

Earlier in October, former transport minister S. Iswaran was sentenced to 12 months’ jail after pleading guilty to five charges, including four under Section 165 for obtaining valuable items as a public servant.

Workers’ Party MP Sylvia Lim (Aljunied GRC) asked whether the definition of a public servant under the Penal Code was fit for purpose for an offence under Section 165, and if Singapore’s anti-corruption laws should be reviewed for greater efficacy.

Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim (Chua Chu Kang GRC) and Mr Yip Hon Weng (Yio Chu Kang) asked if Section 165 may deter individuals and top talent from the private sector from joining or contributing to the public service.

In response, Mr Chan said the rules would not deter good people from joining or contributing to the public service.

“On the contrary, if we do not have an ethos or system that ensures clean, honest government, we would not be able to attract the right people from the private sector to join us,” he added.

The definition of public servants generally includes public officers under the employment of the public service and various individuals executing public duties on behalf of the Government.

On whether the anti-corruption

laws should be reviewed, Mr Chan said there should not be a knee-jerk reaction to immediately tighten or add more rules when individuals fall short.

If the rules were clear, but flouted or ignored, what should be done is to take decisive action against the offender instead of adjusting the rules.

If the rules were unclear, they should be clarified or simplified, he said.

The rules should be updated if they were too lax or do not cover a new situation, added Mr Chan.

“The recent developments show that we do not shy away from doing the right thing to uphold the trust that Singaporeans have in the Government, and this is what we will continue to do,” he said.

Ms Lim noted that after Iswaran’s sentencing, PM Wong issued a statement on the need to act against corruption.

“Noting that the former minister was not actually convicted of corruption, is the Prime Minister actually saying that, regardless of the charges that were preferred and... convicted on, that he thinks that the former minister acted corruptly?” she asked.

Iswaran was in January charged with two counts under the Prevention of Corruption Act, but these were amended at the start of his trial in September to less serious charges under Section 165.

Responding to Ms Lim, Mr Chan said Section 165 was a corruption charge. The difference between the two was that under Section 165, there was no need to prove quid pro quo on both sides, but only to prove that a person had taken the item.

“It doesn’t mean that it’s not a corruption charge,” he said.

Ms Lim also noted that she had raised the review of anti-corruption laws as the Attorney-General’s Chambers, when asked about the amended charges, had said there were litigation risks involved in proceeding with the Prevention of Corruption Act.

She questioned if this would be a reason for the Government to review the Act.

Mr Chan said that as of now, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and enforcement agencies find that the Act’s current framing allows them to do their job.

He added that if new developments arise that warrant a review of the Act, the Government is open to doing so.



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SYSTEM DRAWS RIGHT PEOPLE

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MINISTER-IN-CHARGE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE CHAN CHUN SING, when asked if Section 165 may deter individuals and top talent from the private sector from joining or contributing to the public service.