



HIGH COMMISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
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HIGH COMMISSIONER

28 July 2023

Mr Mark Doyle
Letters Editor
The Economist
The Adelphi
1-11 John Adam St
London, WC2N 6HT

Dear Mark,

The Economist's Banyan column on 27 July 2023, "A slew of scandals puts Singapore's government on the back foot", makes a serious charge: that the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), because it reports to the Prime Minister, who appoints its head, cannot be independent.

This misrepresents the process. CPIB does not require the Prime Minister's permission for its investigations. It sought his concurrence before initiating formal investigation of Minister for Transport S Iswaran because it involved a Cabinet Minister. The Prime Minister concurred within a day of receiving the Director of CPIB's report.

No Prime Minister of Singapore has ever prevented the CPIB from investigating anyone. But even if the Prime Minister does not consent to CPIB investigations, under the Constitution the Director of CPIB can still proceed with the investigations if he obtains the concurrence of the President. This is a constitutional provision unique among Westminster-style democracies. There are also safeguards for the appointment or removal of the Director of CPIB which require the concurrence of the President.

In the case of two Ministers renting state-owned bungalows in Ridout Road, it was the Prime Minister himself who asked CPIB to investigate the matter. The Bureau conducted a thorough examination and found no evidence of wrongdoing or corruption. The Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) concurred with the finding.

The Leader of the Opposition accepted the CPIB's finding, stating in Parliament that he did not believe anybody was making an allegation that the Ministers were corrupt.

When the CPIB completes its investigation of Mr Iswaran, its findings will be submitted to the AGC which will decide on what to do with them. Such is the CPIB's fearsome reputation for thoroughness, few Singaporeans doubt its ability to see any case of corruption to its logical conclusion.

This is why The Economist's charge that simply because the CPIB reports to the Prime Minister calls into question its independence, would strike many Singaporeans as deeply offensive and uninformed.

Would The Economist suggest the head of Scotland Yard is not independent because he is appointed on the advice of the UK Home Secretary, in consultation with the Mayor of London?

If indeed the CPIB is so lacking in independence as The Economist makes out, how could it be possible that Singapore has consistently ranked high in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)? In the latest 2022 CPI, Singapore was ranked fifth – behind only three Scandinavian countries and New Zealand, and ahead of every other Asian country. The UK was ranked 18.

The Prime Minister – as well as his successor, Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong – are as determined as their predecessors were to investigate any case of corruption, no matter whom it involves, thoroughly and transparently. Singaporeans and foreign investors alike can be certain of this.

Yours sincerely,



T K Lim