

CHAPTER 1

GOVERNMENT AND THE SINGAPORE PUBLIC SERVICE

THE WORD 'government' is used loosely in many ways. At times it is used to mean the whole state organisation—the Legislative Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the Administration and the Judiciary. At other times it is used to denote the dominant party or coalition of parties in power for the time being in the Legislative Assembly. Again, in popular language, the acts of a government department or even of an individual public servant are frequently spoken of as acts of the 'government'.

Under the Constitution of 1955, the Executive Government of Singapore consists of the Council of Ministers, with the Governor as President. The departments of the administration are arranged in groups, each of which is in charge of a Minister. There are nine Ministers. Three of these nine (the Chief Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Financial Secretary) are officials. The other six are appointed and are normally drawn from the party or group of parties in power for the time being, i.e., with a majority in the Legislative Assembly. Of these six, the principal minister, called the Chief Minister, is at once the leader of the Government of the day in the Legislative Assembly and the leader of his party.

The Council of Ministers, like the Cabinet in other forms of parliamentary government throughout the British Commonwealth, is the centre of gravity of the Singapore political system. It forms and gives effect to all executive policies, prepares and authorises the legislative programme and exercises control over financial affairs.

The Ministers who comprise the Council are responsible to the Legislative Assembly, and through that body to the people, for the administration of all departments. They are, whether *ex-officio* or appointed, the political heads of the departments. Subject to their responsibility to the Council of Ministers and the Legislative Assembly, they have ultimate control of the departments that go to make up the Singapore Public Service.

The permanent heads of departments, the Permanent Secretaries, on the other hand, are permanent public servants and are responsible to the Ministers for the organisation and conduct of their departments or groups of departments.

As a public servant you serve the Minister in charge of your department. Through him, you serve the Legislative Assembly and hence the people of Singapore.

Your minister has to accept responsibility for your actions—do not let him down!