

Public's trust and keeping systems up to date key to Singapore's fight against corruption: PM Lee

Corruption laws being reviewed, CPIB to get more manpower, new reporting centre for whistleblowers

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PRIME Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Tuesday described the thousands of officers in Singapore's public service as "clean, zealous and well-qualified", but nonetheless pledged that the government would keep up its efforts to keep corruption in check.

Work is already under way to review the Prevention of Corruption Act, the country's principal anti-corruption law enacted in 1960.

And the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), an independent law enforcement agency that reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office, will get 20 per cent more manpower.

Speaking to about 600 public-service officers at the opening of a conference on public service values, Mr Lee also disclosed plans to set up a one-stop corruption-reporting centre.

The centre, likely to be located in the city area to make it accessible, will at the same enable whistleblowers to file their reports discreetly; this facility will come on top of the CPIB's 24-hour hotline and walk-in service at its headquarters in Jalan Bukit Merah.

The CPIB will also set up a permanent heritage gallery alongside the new reporting centre to better educate members of the public about anti-corruption issues.

Mr Lee said at the conference, organised by the CPIB and the Civil Service College and held at the Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre, that fighting corruption goes beyond just having a strong CPIB, which has served Singapore well over the years.

On its part, the government must ensure it keeps all its systems up to date, such as by constantly reviewing procurement rules and spending limits, and tapping technology to spot irregularities in areas such as how public tenders are awarded.

"When we need to change (the rules) and when we find loopholes, we will fix them. After the Brompton bikes case, we changed our pro-



Mr Lee speaking with (from left) Sgt Goh Wee Kian from the police, Sgt Samuel Anadaraj from the SCDF and Sgt Tan Kai Xiang from the police at the Integrity in Action: Public Service Values Conference 2015 held at the Suntec City Convention Centre. PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN/THE STRAITS TIMES

cesses," said Mr Lee, referring to the case in which a former National Parks Board assistant director was convicted of lying to three auditors in 2012 over a S\$57,200 deal to purchase 26 foldable bicycles.

"We may still need to buy foldable bikes, but we make sure we do it honestly and there's no hanky-panky involved."

A recurring theme in his half-hour address was that of trust.

A key reason why Singapore's public service has been able to do good work for the country is that the officers continue to enjoy the trust of the people:

"We trust the public service to carry out its duties capably and competently. We trust the public service to act with integrity, and always in the public interest. This trust that Singaporeans have in the public service as an institution, and each one of you individually, is critical."

The key to maintaining this trust, he added, is for the public service to uphold its policy of zero tolerance for corruption, regardless of the rank and seniority of the officers involved.

"If any of you does something wrong and breaches that trust, you not only let the public service and yourself down, but you also let Singa-

poreans down, and you can do a lot of damage," he said.

Likening corruption to a "cancer" that is difficult to weed out once it takes root, the prime minister described Singapore as a "shining exception" in the world and which has a strong reputation when it comes to having a clean public service.

This should never be taken for granted, he warned. He noted that the Republic had fallen two places to seventh in Transparency International's latest Corruption Perception Index.

Several recent high-profile corruption cases, such as the sex-for-contracts cases involving a senior officer

and the misappropriation of funds by a CPIB branch head, have hurt Singapore's reputation both locally and around the world, he said.

The government keeps a close watch on Singapore's rankings internationally on corruption, transparency and the quality of its government.

"How others assess our performance has a very important influence – whether they are confident in Singapore, whether they are ready and prepared to invest here, whether they have respect for you and me and Singaporeans, and whether we can hold our heads high in the world," said Mr Lee.