

S'pore steps up efforts to stay free of corruption

CPIB's manpower to be boosted, anti-graft laws being reviewed

By **THAM YUEN-C**

SINGAPORE is reviewing its anti-graft laws and will hire more officers to fight corruption, as the nation seeks to maintain its clean image.

It will also set up a one-stop centre for people to report incidents of graft.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in announcing the moves yesterday, said that while Singapore's system is generally "clean and maintains high standards", the problem of corruption "will never disappear completely".

He also referred to the drop in Singapore's ranking on Transparency International's annual list of countries seen as being the least corrupt in the world. Singapore fell two notches to No. 7 last year.

The slide, Mr Lee said, could have been due to recent high-profile corruption cases involving senior civil servants.

These included a sex-for-contracts case of a top officer in the civil defence force and the misappropriation of funds by a head of a branch of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB).

Mr Lee was speaking at a conference organised by the CPIB and Civil Service College on maintaining integrity in the public sector.

He told the 600 public servants at the session that since Singapore's rankings on corruption and transparency can affect investors' confidence and the country's world standing, it must not only uphold but also enhance its reputation for cleanliness.

To achieve the goal, the Government is reviewing the Prevention of Corruption Act, Singapore's principal anti-corruption law enacted in 1960.

It will also increase the CPIB's manpower by more than 20 per cent as corruption cases have become more complex, some with international links.

The bureau's current staff strength is about 120, according to last year's Budget estimates.

In addition, a corruption reporting centre will be set up in an accessible place in the city, to make it easier for people to make complaints.

In his speech, PM Lee also reminded the officers that integrity was key in helping Singapore stay exceptional in the next 50 years.

"If any of you does something wrong, and breaches that trust, you not only let down the public service and yourself, but you are also letting Singaporeans down, and you can do a lot of damage."

Public servants, he said, have been able to do good work because of the trust Singaporeans have in them.

Maintaining this trust, through a policy of zero tolerance for corruption, is crucial.

Singapore is a "shining exception" in a world where corruption is a problem in many countries,

Mr Lee noted. But, he said: "This level of trust the Singapore Public Service enjoys, and this degree of cleanliness in the public service, is a most unnatural state of affairs."

He urged them: "So work doubly hard to maintain the trust you've earned."

To do so, the public service must punish culprits, regardless of rank and seniority.

Its leaders must also lead by example and abide by high standards.

Mr Lee said integrity is not just a public service value, but one firmly ingrained in Singapore society. "This is the real achievement for us... that we have created an anti-corruption culture in Singapore."

Following his speech, the officers had a closed-door dialogue with PM Lee, Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean and CPIB director Wong Hong Kuan.

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