

Singapore keeps high score in fight against graft

Elsewhere, the current state of corruption speaks to a need for greater political integrity in many countries, says Transparency International

By Angela Tan

angelat@sph.com.sg

Singapore

SINGAPORE has maintained its high global score in its fight against corruption even as graft has become more pervasive in the rest of the world, according to the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI) on Thursday.

The city-state scored 85 on graft watchdog TI's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, which uses a scale that ranges from zero, for highly corrupt, to 100, for very clean. It is the only Asian country that made it to the global top 10.

Denmark and New Zealand shared the pole position, with a score of 87, in the CPI, which ranked 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. Finland came in third, with a score of 86 after gaining one point compared to the previous year. It was followed by Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland in the fourth position, with scores of 85.

In 2018, Singapore shared the third position with Finland, Sweden and Switzerland; all scoring 85.

Elsewhere, the CPI 2019 revealed more than two-thirds of countries – along with many of the world's most advanced economies – were stagnating or showing signs of backsliding in their anti-corruption efforts. They scored below 50, with an average score of only 43.

Delia Ferreira Rubio, chair of TI, said: "Frustration with government

Corruption Perceptions Index 2019 vs 2018

COUNTRY	CPI SCORE 2019	RANK 2019	CPI SCORE 2018	RANK 2018
New Zealand	87	1	87	2
Denmark	87	1	88	1
Finland	86	3	85	3
Switzerland	85	4	85	3
Singapore	85	4	85	3
Sweden	85	4	85	3
Norway	84	7	84	7
Netherlands	82	8	82	8
Luxembourg	80	9	81	9
Germany	80	9	80	11

Source: Transparency International

corruption and lack of trust in institutions speaks to a need for greater political integrity.

"Governments must urgently address the corrupting role of big money in political party financing and the undue influence it exerts on our political systems."

Since 2012, only 22 countries have significantly improved their scores, including Estonia, Greece and Guyana. Twenty-one have significantly declined. These include Australia, Canada and Nicaragua.

"Our research shows several of the most advanced economies cannot afford to be complacent if they are to keep up their anti-corruption momentum. Four G-7 countries score lower than last year: Canada (-4), France (-3), the UK (-3) and the US (-2). Germany and Japan have seen no improvement, while Italy gained one point."

Analysis shows that countries that perform well on the CPI also have stronger enforcement of campaign finance regulations and broader range of political consultation.

Countries where campaign finance regulations are comprehensive and systematically enforced have an average score of 70 on the CPI, whereas countries where such regulations either do not exist or are poorly enforced score an average of just 34 and 35 respectively.

Sixty per cent of the countries that significantly improved their CPI scores since 2012 also strengthened regulations around campaign donations.

"The lack of real progress against corruption in most countries is disappointing and has profound negative effects on citizens around the world," said Patricia Moreira, TI's managing director.

"To have any chance of ending corruption and improving peoples' lives, we must tackle the relationship between politics and big money. All citizens must be represented in decision-making," Ms Moreira said.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), Singapore's graft fighters, said the corruption situation in the city-state remains firmly under control, and the number of public sector corruption cases has remained low over the years.

Still, Denis Tang, CPIB's director, warned against complacency.

"In fact, we must work even harder to ensure that incorruptibility remains part of the DNA of every Singaporean. Together with the com-

munity and all stakeholders, the CPIB remains committed to combat corruption with strong resolve to ensure that the corruption situation in Singapore remains firmly under control," Mr Tang said.

Besides TI-CPI, Singapore has also been ranked the least corrupt country in the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) 2019 report on corruption in Asia, a position the city-state has held since 1995. In the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2019, Singapore was also ranked third for the absence of corruption, the top Asian nation out of 126 countries ranked.

In the latest TI-CPI, nine sources were used to arrive at the score for

Singapore. These are Bertelsman Foundation Transformation Index, Economist Intelligence Unit Country Ratings, Global Insight Country Risk Ratings, IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook, PERC Asia Risk Guide, PRS International Country Risk Guide, Varieties of Democracy Project, World Economic Forum EOS and World Justice Project Rule of Law Index.

To have any chance of curbing corruption, governments must strengthen checks and balances, limit the influence of big money in politics and ensure broad input in political decision-making. Public policies and resources should not be determined by economic power or political influence, but by fair consultation and impartial budget allocation, TI stressed.

Source: The Business Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Permission required for reproduction.