

S'pore climbs to 7th on global least-corrupt index

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Singapore has moved up a notch in an annual ranking of countries deemed the least corrupt.

It came in seventh in graft watchdog Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index for last year, up from eighth place in 2015.

This was despite it scoring 84 points on the latest index – down from 85 the previous year – on a scale that goes from zero, for highly corrupt, to 100, for very clean.

Denmark and New Zealand tied for first place, with 90 points. They were followed by Finland (89), Sweden (88), Switzerland (86) and Norway (85).

Singapore has consistently made it to the index's top 10, and remains the only Asian country to make the cut. The Republic had claimed the No. 5 spot for three years prior to 2014, when it slid to seventh place.

Most countries in the Asia-Pacific, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, ended up in the bottom half of the latest ranking, with scores of 40 or less. Malaysia was ranked in 55th place, alongside Croatia.

Mr Wong Hong Kuan, director of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), said in a statement yesterday that Singapore's rank is a testament to its continued vigilance, commitment and zero tolerance in the fight against corruption.

The result is consistent with the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy's 2016 Report on Corruption in Asia, he added. This report named Singapore the least corrupt country in Asia – a position it has held since 1995.

Mr Wong said: "The CPIB will continue to battle corruption without fear or favour so as to uphold the highest level of integrity and incorruptibility in Singapore."

A TI spokesman told The Straits Times that Singapore faced corruption challenges in its early years, but the progressive steps it has taken to clean up the public sector and set up an anti-corruption agency made it "one of the cleanest countries in the region and the world".

The CPIB, she noted, has powers for both prosecution and prevention, and enjoys "clear independence to conduct its activities without political influences".

"There are only few such anti-corruption agencies in the region and beyond," she said.

While the 2016 index paints a bleak picture of global corruption, with more countries declining than improving, observers believe Singapore has done well to maintain its reputation of intolerance for graft.

They point to the Republic's aggressive enforcement of anti-corruption laws and new steps to keep corruption at bay.

In 2015, the Government announced that it was enhancing efforts to keep graft at bay, including reviewing the Prevention of Corrup-

tion Act and boosting manpower at the CPIB.

Mr Wilson Ang, a partner handling anti-corruption matters at law firm Norton Rose Fulbright, believes these measures – which signal Singapore's commitment to fighting graft – may have helped the country keep its high rank.

More can be done, such as enacting legislation to protect whistleblowers, he added.

The CPIB's Mr Wong cited the new Corruption Reporting and Heritage Centre in Whitley Road, which opened earlier this month, as part of the bureau's ongoing anti-corruption efforts. This centre serves as a more convenient avenue for the public to lodge complaints.

The index captures perceptions of the extent of corruption in the public sector in 176 countries and territories, as viewed by country ex-

perts and business people.

It aggregates 13 sources of data from institutions such as the Economist Intelligence Unit.

In a statement, TI noted that the global average stood at "a paltry 43, indicating endemic corruption in a country's public sector".

The results highlight the link between corruption and inequality, it said, adding: "The interplay of corruption and inequality also feeds populism. When traditional politicians fail to tackle corruption, people grow cynical."

"Increasingly, people are turning to populist leaders who promise to break the cycle of corruption and privilege. Yet, this is likely to exacerbate – rather than resolve – the tensions that fed the populist surge in the first place," TI said.

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Corruption Perceptions Index 2016

TOP-RANKED COUNTRIES

2016 rank	Country	2016 score	2015 score
1	Denmark	90	91
1	New Zealand	90	88
3	Finland	89	90
4	Sweden	88	89
5	Switzerland	86	86
6	Norway	85	87
7	Singapore	84	85
8	Netherlands	83	87
9	Canada	82	83
10	Germany	81	81
10	Luxembourg	81	81
10	Britain	81	81

BOTTOM-RANKED COUNTRIES

2016 rank	Country	2016 score	2015 score
166	Iraq	17	16
166	Venezuela	17	17
168	Guinea-Bissau	16	17
169	Afghanistan	15	11
170	Libya	14	16
170	Sudan	14	12
170	Yemen	14	18
173	Syria	13	18
174	North Korea	12	8
175	South Sudan	11	15
176	Somalia	10	8

Source: TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

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