

736 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED LAST YEAR

Corruption complaints at 30-year low: CPIB

Release of detailed statistics part of move to maintain strong anti-graft culture in Spore

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SINGAPORE—Traditionally an organisation that keeps its workings away from the public eye, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) yesterday released for the first time detailed statistics, which showed that the number of complaints it received fell to a 30-year low last year.

Among these, the number of complaints containing enough information for investigations to be carried out is also at the lowest in three decades, showing that the corruption situation in Singapore remains stable, the bureau said in a press release yesterday.

The CPIB received 736 complaints last year, 7 per cent lower than the 792 in 2013. Of these, 136 cases were logged for graft investigations. Of the rest, some complaints were not able to be acted on because of scanty information, while others pertained to other kinds of offences, such as cheating and misappropriation of funds.

A total of 168 cases were prosecuted in court last year, although the figure could include cases that the CPIB had started work on in preceding years. The conviction rate was 96 per cent.

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in part, to maintain a strong anti-graft culture, the CPIB said.

The move comes after Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced stronger measures to fight corruption in January, as he noted that high-profile cases in recent years have hurt Singapore's pristine reputation not only in the eyes of the public, but also among the international community.

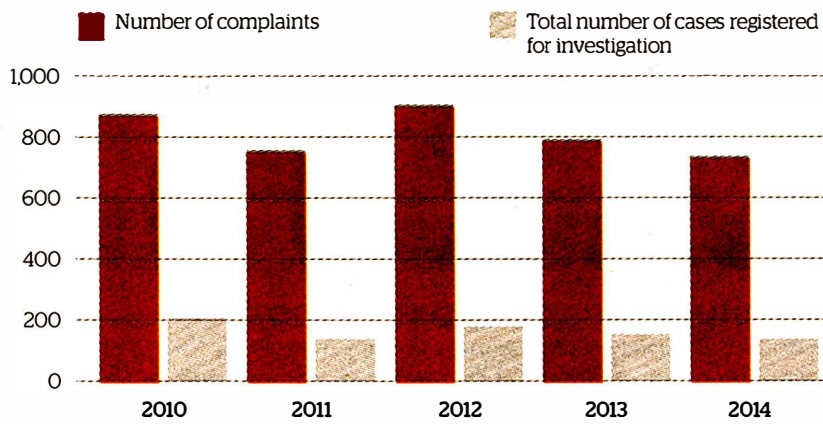
While these cases involving prominent and senior public officers are fresh in the memory, the CPIB's statistics showed the bulk of the investigable complaints last year involved the private sector (85 per cent).

The CPIB flagged three areas of concerns from the private employees it prosecuted last year — construction; sales of household goods in department stores; and warehouse and logistics services.

Other than a review of anti-graft laws and beefing up of the CPIB's manpower, Mr Lee had also announced that a new one-stop centre will be set up in the city centre, which will allow whistle-blowers to come forward in a discreet manner. This centre is expected to be ready in a year's time, CPIB said, without giving more details.

The bureau's inaugural statistics report also showed that complaints lodged in person are the most likely to result in investigation. However, only 8 per cent of complaints last year were walk-ins.

Singapore's graft situation under control: CPIB



Source: CPIB

TODAY

Out of the 59 complaints made in person, 63 per cent of them resulted in investigations. In contrast, only 6 per cent of the 280 complaints via email and fax — the predominant mode — had enough details for investigators to work with.

To encourage more walk-ins from whistle-blowers, better protection is needed, said corporate governance experts. In the United States and the United Kingdom, for instance, protection for whistle-blowers is legislated, they noted.

Professor Mak Yuen Teen from National University of Singapore said the one-stop centre to allow for more discreet reporting is not enough assur-

ance for whistle-blowers.

While the Prevention of Corruption Act offers some protection — such as the withholding of names and addresses of informants — there should be a comprehensive piece of legislation that provides protection against reprisals or potentially defamatory action, he said.

What whistle-blowers fear most, said lawyer Daniel Chia from Morgan Lewis Stamford, is that the affected party may sue for defamation if the complaint is dismissed. This has a chilling effect on complaints, he added.

Prof Mak added that some countries such as the UK also have an Ombudsman to whom protected disclo-

tures can be made.

Without the level of assurance that legislation can provide, certain disclosures may not be forthcoming, said Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan, citing subordinates who hold back on reporting their bosses for suspected corrupt acts out of fear of repercussions.

"These are precisely the people in the best positions to sense when something is amiss, but the power difference often causes them to hold back on complaints. This is where greater assurance of protection will help," he said.

However, Associate Professor Tan noted that laws meant to protect whistle-blowers may also be abused by some to mount personal attacks.

"There must be sufficient sanctions and a clear definition of a 'whistle-blower' to prevent abuse," he said.

Most of the experts said complaints should not be anonymous to allow for more effective investigations.

Allowing anonymity will lead to unsubstantiated complaints, which may result in a waste of time and resources, said lawyer Raj Mannar from Pelter Low LLC.

The CPIB, however, said all complaints will be deliberated upon in the same manner regardless of whether the complainant has identified himself or chooses to remain anonymous.

Reiterating its zero-tolerance stance, CPIB director Wong Hong Kuan added: "No amount is too trivial. Even if it involves a S\$1 bribe, the CPIB has and will not hesitate to investigate and get to the root of the matter."



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Assoc Prof Eugene Tan
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