



UPHOLDING INTEGRITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE



Civil Service College
Singapore

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INTRODUCTION

“Corruption must never be tolerated. It stunts economic development, undermines public trust and erodes our social fabric. Fighting corruption is an unceasing challenge.”

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 2012¹

Singapore’s reputation for incorruptibility is hard won through determined efforts in the decades since independence. In the period before independence in 1965, corruption ran rife throughout the public service. Anti-corruption efforts were ineffective, with the Prevention of Corruption Ordinance (POCO) providing a weak legal enforcement framework and the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) within the police force stymied by a lack of resources. Corruption in the police force exacerbated the situation. In contrast, present-day Singapore has consistently attained a high ranking in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, sustaining a top-5 position from 2009 to 2013.

Singapore’s transformation from a corruption-ridden society to one of the cleanest countries in the world deserves closer scrutiny. This booklet summarises the major factors that have contributed towards Singapore’s transformation into a clean country with low levels of corruption, namely strong political will against corruption, an effective anti-corruption agency, an independent judiciary, effective laws, a public service that eschews corruption and a zero tolerance towards corruption.



Dealing Effectively with Corruption

Source: Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB). Reproduced with permission from the CPIB.

STRONG POLITICAL WILL AGAINST CORRUPTION

“We had a deep sense of mission to establish a clean and effective government. When we took the oath of office at the ceremony in the city council chamber in June 1959, we all wore white shirts and white slacks to symbolise purity and honesty in our personal behaviour and our public life. The people expected this of us, and we were determined to live up to their expectations.”

Lee Kuan Yew, First Prime Minister of Singapore²

The most significant driver for Singapore’s anti-corruption efforts is the political will to fight corruption at all levels of society, even at the highest levels of political leadership. As a sign of their commitment to eradicate corruption, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s first prime minister and his colleagues of the People’s Action Party (PAP) took the oath of office in 1959 wearing white, to symbolise purity. No one, not even Cabinet Ministers, is exempt from investigations into allegations of corrupt behaviour.



Source: Ministry of Information and the Arts Collection, Courtesy of National Archives of Singapore

Group photograph of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (right) and his Cabinet outside City Hall after the swearing-in of the new government of Singapore, 5 June 1959.

PAST POLITICAL LEADERS WHO HAVE BEEN INVESTIGATED FOR CORRUPTION

Case of Tan Kia Gan

Tan Kia Gan, former Minister for National Development, was investigated in 1966 for allegedly accepting bribes to help a friend sell aircraft to Malaysian Airways. As witnesses did not want to implicate Tan, he was administratively stripped of all public appointments by the Government.³

Case of Wee Toon Boon

Wee Toon Boon, former Minister of State for Environment, was charged in court for corruption in 1975 for accepting bribes from a property developer. Wee was jailed for 18 months and ordered to pay a penalty of \$7,023.⁴

Case of Teh Cheang Wan

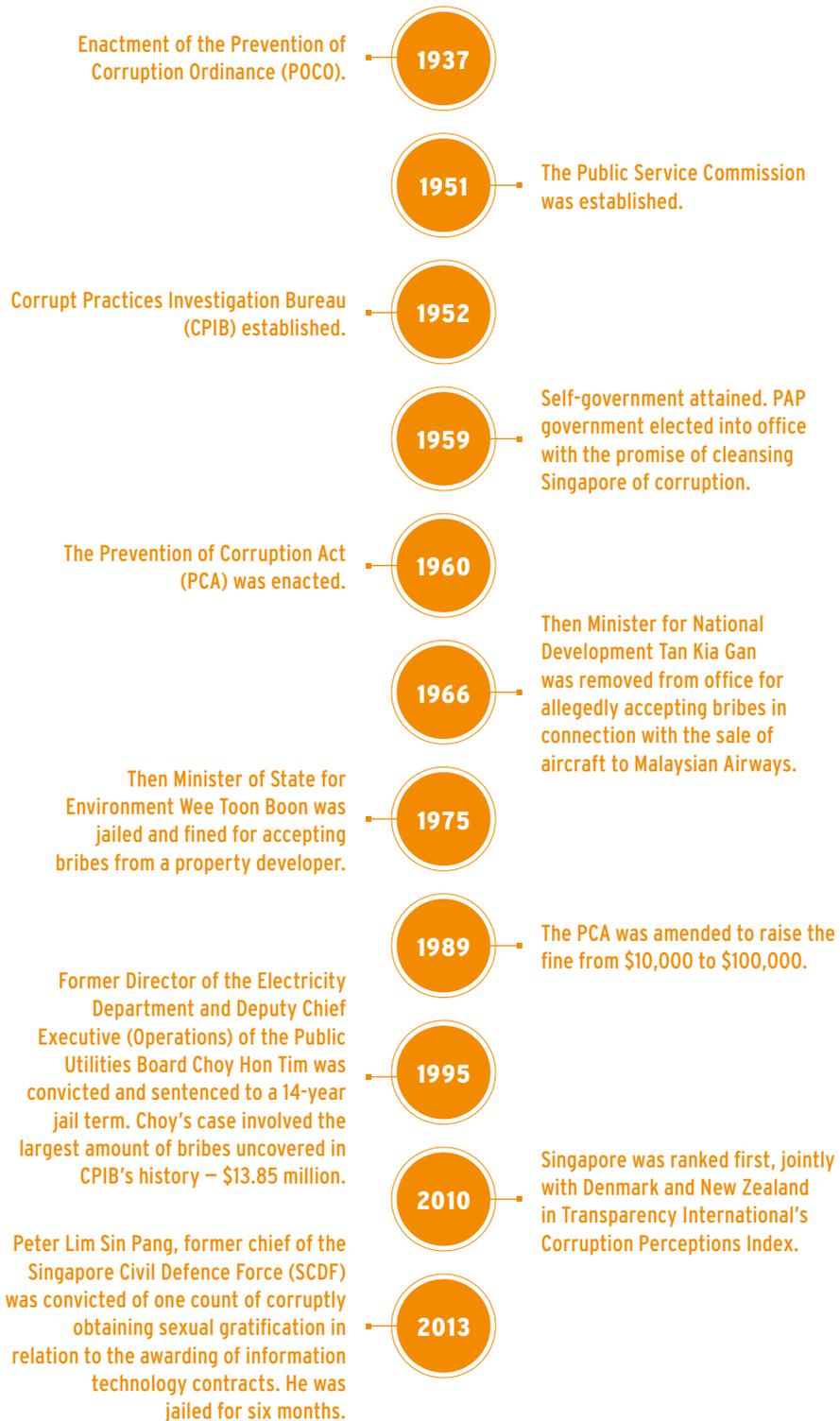
Teh Cheang Wan, then Minister for National Development, was investigated in 1986 for allegedly accepting bribes from property developers. Teh committed suicide before he could be formally charged in court.⁵

THE PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION ACT, AN EMPOWERED BUREAU AND AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY

“Therefore, this Government is determined to take all possible steps to see that all necessary legislative and administrative measures are taken to reduce the opportunities of corruption, to make its detection easier, and to deter and punish severely those who are susceptible to it and engage in it shamelessly.”

Ong Pang Boon, former Minister for Home Affairs, 1960⁶

Formed in 1952, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) replaced the colonial ACB, which was ineffective and under-resourced. CPIB reported directly to the Colonial Secretary. When the PAP came into power in 1959 with the advent of internal self-rule, one of its first priorities was to stamp out corruption. CPIB was given a new lease of life with the enactment of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA) in 1960. PCA widened the scope of what constituted a corrupt act to include “various forms of gratification”. The fine was also raised to \$10,000 and/or 5 years’ imprisonment if convicted. The fine was later raised to \$100,000 in 1989.



In addition, CPIB officers were given powers of arrest and search of suspects. PCA was further amended in 1981, empowering the Courts to order the offender to repay the gratification corruptly obtained, in part or in full. Under the PCA, the amount or money value may be recovered as a civil debt. The Corruption, Drug Trafficking and other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act can also be invoked to confiscate any benefits derived from corruption from anyone convicted of the crime. Public officers convicted of corruption may also lose their jobs, benefits or pension. Unlike ACB, CPIB was placed directly under the Colonial Secretary although administratively attached to the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC). After attainment of self-government in 1959, CPIB came under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Following independence through merger with the Federation of Malaya, North Borneo and Sarawak to form Malaysia in 1963, CPIB came under the Prime Minister's Office. After Singapore was ejected from Malaysia in 1965, CPIB briefly came under the wing of AGC again, before reverting to the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office.

CPIB not only acts against corruption in the Public Service, it also acts against corruption in the private sector. CPIB has investigated corruption cases ranging from petty ones involving restaurant chefs and suppliers to high-profile cases involving criminal syndicates trying to fix soccer matches or lottery results. CPIB has also investigated corruption within the police force. Upon the conclusion of CPIB investigations, all alleged corruption cases are handed over to AGC to obtain the Public Prosecutor's consent to proceed with court proceedings. As a result, CPIB has a fearsome reputation, and is trusted by the public

during investigations. If the Prime Minister were ever to stop a CPIB investigation on himself or a member of the Cabinet, the President can order the CPIB director to resume investigations.⁷

As Lee Kuan Yew puts it, “CPIB has been and is a tenacious and effective instrument against corruption. The Bureau and its officers have contributed to Singapore’s standing, giving confidence to investors that has led to our progress and prosperity”.⁸

An independent judiciary further provides protection from political interference. The Chief Justice is appointed by the President on advice from the Prime Minister and the Council of Presidential Advisers. District judges and magistrates are appointed by the President with advice from the Chief Justice. Various provisions of the Constitution guarantee the independence of the Supreme Court judiciary. A judge may only be removed from office by the President on the advice of a tribunal of judges of the Supreme Court or those who hold or have equivalent offices in the Commonwealth on grounds of misbehaviour, inability, infirmity of body or mind, or any other cause that prevents judges from properly discharging the functions of their office.

AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICE THAT ESCHEWS CORRUPTION AND A ZERO TOLERANCE TOWARDS CORRUPTION

“The Government is deeply conscious that a government cannot survive, no matter how good its aims and intentions are, if corruption still exists in its ranks and its public services on which it depends to provide the efficient and effective administrative machinery to translate its policies into action.”

Ong Pang Boon, former Minister for Home Affairs, 1960⁹

The enforcement by the anti-corruption agencies needs to be supported by a public service culture that values integrity, incorruptibility and transparency. The practice of meritocracy in the public service ensures that the best person, regardless of family background, ethnicity, religion and gender, is hired for the job. In addition, an effective public service helps with corruption control. Regular review of administrative rules and processes to improve efficiencies reduce the need to pay bribes to hasten application processes, improve public service delivery and raise customer satisfaction levels.¹⁰

CPIB may, in the course of its investigations, come across cases in the public sector which reveal corruption-prone areas or loopholes in the procedures. Based on its findings, CPIB reviews the administrative processes that may be prone to corrupt practices, subsequently recommending changes in the processes.¹¹

As a result, the Singapore Public Service is well regarded internationally. In the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators project, from 2008 to 2013, Singapore was ranked among the top 10 percentile for effectiveness of governance, corruption control and rule of law (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. SINGAPORE'S PERCENTILE POSITION IN THE WORLDWIDE GOVERNANCE INDICATORS PROJECT¹²

Year	Control of Corruption	Regulatory Quality	Government Effectiveness	Rule of Law
2008	98	99	100	92
2009	95	98	100	92
2010	99	98	100	93
2011	97	96	100	93
2012	97	100	100	96
2013	97	100	100	95

The clean Public Service today is the result of a political will that passed laws with deterrent sentences to reduce the incentives of corruption. Subsequently, pay in the Public Service started to increase in 1972 to match the pay in the private sector as a talent retention measure. By making pay in the Public Service equitable to the private sector, corruption was changed from a low-risk/high-reward activity to a high-risk/low-reward activity.¹³

Opportunities for corruption were also reduced by using open markets rather than closed administrative mechanisms to allocate resources. As an example, due to land-scarcity in Singapore, the decision was made to reduce the space allocated for roads and to limit the number of cars in Singapore. As such, people purchasing cars had to buy a Certificate of Entitlement (COE) to own them. An open auction system was established for the pricing of these COEs. If a closed administrative system of allocating COEs had been adopted, the opportunities for corruption could have increased, since public officers could be bribed to guarantee COEs to specific individuals.

The Public Service Commission (PSC), a neutral and independent body, was constituted in 1951 as an independent organ of state to appoint, promote, transfer, dismiss and exercise disciplinary control over public officers. The PSC Secretariat, which provides secretariat support to the PSC, is responsible for setting conduct and discipline policies. It ensures that officers maintain the highest standards of personal conduct to uphold the integrity of the Public Service.

In addition, the Public Service is guided by the values of Integrity, Service and Excellence and a Code of Conduct which sets out the standards of behaviour expected of public officers. For example, the Government Instruction Manual for public officers states that:

- a public officer cannot borrow money from any person who has official dealings with him;
- a public officer cannot use any official information to further his private interest;

- a public officer is required to declare his assets at his first appointment and also annually; and
- a public officer cannot receive any gift offered to him on account of his official position or official work.

Officers also receive relevant training on values and conduct through programmes offered by the Civil Service College, some of which are compulsory for new officers. Training is also conducted at various points in an officer's career, through relevant milestone programmes. These sessions take the form of talks, seminars, and workshops involving the Code of Conduct and Public Service values.

Internal efforts in reducing opportunities for corruption are complemented by the work at the Auditor-General's Office (AGO). AGO conducts audits on public agencies to ensure that government agencies adhere to proper accounting standards and provide financial accountability of public monies. Every year, AGO submits its audit report to the Public Accounts Committee, comprising various members of Parliament. The report contains observations of systemic weaknesses, non-compliance of control procedures, or wasteful use of public funds. Agencies with lapses have to respond on how they have remedied the situation to prevent similar lapses in future.¹⁴

CASES OF SENIOR PUBLIC SERVANTS CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION

Case of Choy Hon Tim

Choy Hon Tim, a former deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Public Utilities Board, was prosecuted in 1995 and jailed for 14 years for receiving bribes amounting to \$13.85 million from various contractors over several years.¹⁵

Case of Peter Lim Sin Pang

Peter Lim Sin Pang, a former Commissioner of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), was prosecuted in 2012 and jailed for 6 months, for obtaining sexual gratification from a sales director of an information technology company in return for awarding SCDF contracts to her company.¹⁶

The Public Service is also transparent about the lapses that have occurred, even those committed by senior public servants. The visibility of these cases shows that the Public Service is swift and decisive in dealing with corruption regardless of the seniority of the personnel involved.

The Public Service's strong stance against corruption has been ably supported by Singapore's social attitudes and cultural norms developed since self-government was attained in 1959. The PAP government was elected in that year on an electoral platform that included a political commitment to take prompt and comprehensive action to cleanse Singapore of corruption. Singapore society has since embraced the values of incorruptibility and meritocracy. These values have become important benchmarks in assessing the effectiveness of the Public Service and the ruling government. Thus, a culture of zero tolerance against corruption has been ingrained in both the Public Service and society as a whole. Any person or organisation in Singapore that fails to live up to these high standards of propriety will be both severely punished and stigmatised. This constitutes the ultimate deterrence against corrupt acts.

CONCLUSION

The combination of six important components—strong political will, an effective anti-corruption agency, an independent judiciary, effective laws, a public service that eschews corruption and a zero tolerance towards corruption—has earned Singapore a strong reputation for incorruptibility. In Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, Singapore has been ranked consistently as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. Sustaining this renowned reputation will be the greatest challenge for Singapore. The leaders, the institutions, the Public Service and the populace as a whole will have to remain vigilant for Singapore to continue to be regarded as one of the least corrupt countries in the world, and to contribute to Singapore’s social and economic progress.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), *The Journey: 60 Years of Fighting Corruption in Singapore* (Singapore: Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, 2012), 4.
 - ² Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965–2000* (Singapore: Times Media and The Straits Times Press, 2000), 183.
 - ³ See the CPIB website on cases involving politicians, http://app.cpib.gov.sg/cpib_new/user/default.aspx?pgID=237 (accessed July 30, 2014).
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Ibid.
 - ⁶ Singapore Parliament Reports, *Prevention of Corruption Bill*, sess. 1, vol. 12, cols 376–377, February 13, 1960 (speech by Ong Pang Boon, Minister for Home Affairs).
 - ⁷ Chapter 1, Article 22G of the Singapore Constitution.
 - ⁸ Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), *The Journey: 60 Years of Fighting Corruption in Singapore* (Singapore: Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, 2012), 9.
 - ⁹ Singapore Parliamentary Reports, *Prevention of Corruption Bill*, sess. 1, vol. 12, cols 375–378, February 13, 1960 (speech by Ong Pang Boon, Minister for Home Affairs).
 - ¹⁰ See Lim Siong Guan, “Integrity with Empowerment: Challenges Facing Singapore in Combating Corruption in the 21st Century”, speech delivered at the Seminar on Hong Kong into the 21st Century—Maintaining Integrity in the Civil Service, May 21, 1998, <http://app.cpib.gov.sg/data/website/doc/ManagePage/247/Speech.Lim.Siong.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2014).
 - ¹¹ See the CPIB webpage, “Organisations We Work Closely With”, http://app.cpib.gov.sg/cpib_new/user/default.aspx?pgID=124 (accessed July 30, 2014).
 - ¹² This is based on the work of Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi for the World Bank. The dataset is available for download at: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home> (accessed November 26, 2014).
 - ¹³ Jon S.T. Quah, *Public Administration Singapore Style* (Singapore: Talisman, 2010), 189.
 - ¹⁴ See the AGO webpage, “What Do We Do?”, <http://www.ago.gov.sg/ourwork.html> (accessed July 30, 2014).
 - ¹⁵ See the CPIB webpage on cases involving senior public officers, http://app.cpib.gov.sg/cpib_new/user/default.aspx?pgID=236 (accessed July 30, 2014).
 - ¹⁶ Tham Yuen-C and Lim Yanliang, “Ex-SCDF Chief Peter Lim Found Guilty of Corruption”, *The Straits Times*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/ex-scdf-chief-peter-lim-found-guilty-corruption-20130531> (accessed July 30, 2014); Melissa Lin, “Former SCDF Chief Peter Lim Dismissed from Public Service”, *The Straits Times*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/singapore/story/former-scdf-chief-peter-lim-dismissed-public-service-20130831> (accessed July 30, 2014).
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FURTHER READING

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Quah, Jon S. T., *Curbing Corruption in Asian Countries: An Impossible Dream?* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

ONLINE RESOURCES

ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific, <http://www.oecd.org/site/adboecdanti-corruptioninitiative/>

Attorney-General’s Chambers Singapore, www.agc.gov.sg

Auditor-General’s Office Singapore, www.ago.gov.sg

Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, www.cpib.gov.sg

e-Integrity Learning & Resource Center, <http://e-integrity.net/elearning/index/index.php>

Globalethics.net, <http://www.globethics.net/>

International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities, <http://www.iaaca.org/>

Singapore Public Service Commission, www.psc.gov.sg

Transparency International, www.transparency.org



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