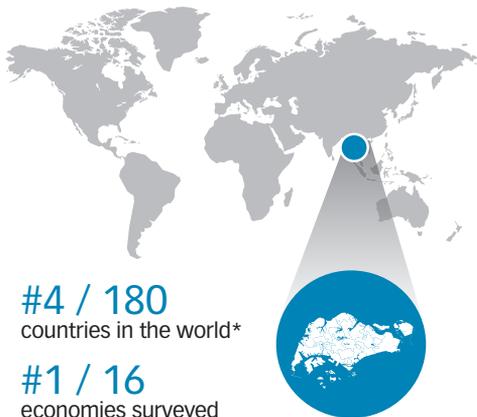


Corruption situation in Singapore remains firmly under control

Singapore is one of the least corrupt countries



Corruption-related reports received in 2019



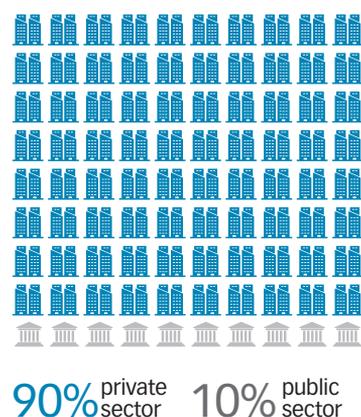
350 reports
▼ 2% from 2018

New cases registered for investigations in 2019



119 cases
▲ 11% from 2018

Private sector cases form majority



Source: Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau

Singapore's graft rate stays low as fight continues despite Covid-19

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INVESTIGATIONS of the individuals involved in Keppel Offshore & Marine's (Keppel O&M) corruption scandal, which saw bribes of more than US\$50 million grease the hands of officials in Brazil over 13 years in exchange for business deals, are still ongoing.

"The case has not been concluded," said Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) director of investigations Vincent Lim. "We are still liaising with counterpart authorities overseas. The case is transnational in nature with different jurisdictions. It involves several parties that require us to go through formal channels to reach out to the foreign witnesses as well as in reviewing the evidence.

"All these take time, but it will be concluded in due course. We want to be complete and cover all grounds before we present the case to the Attorney-General's Chamber (AGC) for review."

Keppel O&M has accepted a conditional warning from CPIB. This was issued in lieu of prosecution as due consideration was given to the substantial cooperation rendered by Keppel O&M to the investigations – which included the unit's self-reporting to AGC and CPIB of the corrupt payments made by it – and the extensive remedial measures taken.

In its annual review of corruption in Asia, Political & Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC) commended the Singapore government's response to high-level cases of corruption like in Keppel O&M's case.

"Perhaps even more telling is what did not make the news because it did not happen. For example, a scandal surfaced in January of this year involving a massive effort by Airbus to

pay bribes to win export orders for its planes. A number of Asian countries were connected to the scandal, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and China, but there was no mention of Singapore, even though Singapore Airlines is a major Airbus customer," PERC said.

The update on Keppel O&M was in response to queries from *The Business Times*, following the publication of the latest statistics by the CPIB on Wednesday.

The bureau received 350 corruption-related reports last year, down 2 per cent from the 358 reports received in 2018. Nonetheless, more cases were registered for investigation due to better quality information received. This was attributable not only to the improvement in the quality of the information that CPIB received from complainants but also the efforts put in place to enhance some of the information received through investigative enquiries and intelligence probes. CPIB has also significantly enhanced prevention and outreach efforts in 2019 to raise anti-corruption awareness.

At 107, private sector cases continued to form 90 per cent of all the cases registered for investigation. Of these, 10 per cent involved public sector employees rejecting bribes offered by private sector individuals. The number of public sector cases registered in 2019 remained low at 10 per cent and was similar to the annual average of the preceding four years.

A total of 147 individuals were prosecuted in court for offences investigated by CPIB. Of these, 142 were private sector individuals, with about 30 per cent in construction and building maintenance work.

Despite the higher workload, CPIB achieved a higher clearance rate, completing investigations into 85 per

cent of the number of subjects investigated last year. This compared to 80 per cent clearance rate in 2018. Conviction rate over the past five years has remained above 97 per cent.

Like most operations in the city-state, the CPIB – Singapore's graft fighters under the Prime Minister's Office – has been operating a core team in its headquarters, while the majority has been working from home.

"It's business as usual. Corruption and non-corruption complaints are still being received and being dealt with," said Denis Tang, CPIB's director.

"We have been focusing on the critical and time-sensitive cases. Those that are not urgent, we are doing the backend enrichment until the circuit breaker is over."

Mr Lim added that precautions are taken if there is a need for face-to-face interviews.

So far, there have been no reports of Covid-19 related corruption even though procurement of essential goods and services like masks has been accelerated.

"In times of crisis, Singapore has fast track procurement processes with various checks and balances. In fact, because of such fast track procedures, managements are super alert and vigilant, looking out for anomalies and compromises," Mr Tang said.

"We also believe that Singapore and corporates here have strong anti-corruption fundamentals. Having said that, we remain vigilant," he added.

While it is too early to assess the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on corruption, the bureau has received complaints of government grants not being passed on to tenants.

"As these are not corruption per se, they are being passed on to the relevant agencies for action," Mr Tang said.