

PAP took a hit, but will continue to uphold standards, says PM Lee

He assures Singaporeans that the party will protect integrity of the system of govt

Goh Yan Han
Political Correspondent

The People's Action Party (PAP) has taken a hit with the investigation into Transport Minister S. Iswaran, and the resignations of two MPs, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged on Wednesday.

But he assured Singaporeans that the party would protect the integrity of the system of government.

"For the good of our country, we

will carry through what needs to be done in accordance with the law, even if it may be politically embarrassing and painful to the party. I will not flinch or hesitate to do my duty, to keep our system robust and clean."

He said: "But we will show Singaporeans that we will uphold standards and do the right thing, so that trust is maintained, and the Singapore system continues to work well.

"This is my approach, and I am confident it will be my successor's approach too. And this is how we will keep Singapore safe, strong

and prosperous for many years to come."

He noted that there had been a great deal of public interest over the recent series of incidents, with the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) arresting and investigating Mr Iswaran, the resignation of two MPs, and the allegations about the Ridout Road rentals.

"The way we have handled these incidents shows how seriously the PAP takes our responsibility of governing Singapore, and being accountable to Parliament and to Singaporeans," said PM Lee, addressing the House.

He assured MPs that when such issues come up, the party will deal with them properly and transparently, as it has done.

On the issue of CPIB's investigation involving Mr Iswaran, when the bureau discovered on its own that it had reason to arrest and interview a minister, it opened a formal investigation.

"Nobody tipped them off. There had been no public scandal. CPIB came across something that needed investigating, and proceeded to do their job," PM Lee said.

On the issue of the PAP MPs' affairs, he added: "We took some time to sort it out, probably longer than we should have. But we did what we needed to do, and put the situation right."

The CPIB had also earlier thoroughly investigated ministers K. Shanmugam and Vivian Balakrishnan on the Ridout Road rentals, and found no wrongdoing on their

part.

These incidents show two aspects of how the PAP government works, said PM Lee.

One, when there is a suspicion or allegation of wrongdoing in the discharge of official duties, especially possible corruption, there is zero tolerance.

Two, when people slip in their personal lives, the PAP will look at the facts of each case carefully, and deal with the matter as humanely and sensitively as possible, according to the principles the party has established, he said.

"Systems are composed of human beings. In any system, however comprehensive the safeguards, sometimes something will still go wrong. The PAP Government does our utmost to minimise that possi-

bility," said PM Lee.

He added that the party works hard to identify the right people to bring into politics and appoint to responsible positions.

They are vetted carefully, tested and stretched, before they are entrusted with heavier responsibilities.

Often they measure up, but sometimes they fall short. Occasionally, they transgress norms of conduct or commit wrongdoing, he said.

He noted that Singapore has seen corruption cases involving political office-holders in the past, including Mr Teh Cheang Wan, former minister for national development, in 1986; and Mr Phey Yew Kok, former MP and president of the National Trades Union Congress, in 1979.

"All these cases were handled by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who was then prime minister – thoroughly, transparently, and applying the full force of the law," said PM Lee.

"That is still how the PAP Government deals with such cases.

"It's not changed under my charge; and it won't under my successor either."