

CPIB investigated higher proportion of reported cases in 2023

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The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) received fewer reports in 2023 than in the previous year, but a higher proportion of the cases were subjected to investigation.

Most of the cases involved the private sector.

The public sector probes included high-profile cases such as the ongoing investigation into former transport minister S. Iswaran and his alleged dealings with two businessmen.

Iswaran has been charged in court with a number of corruption-related offences.

In a statement on April 30, the anti-graft agency said of the 215 corruption-related reports it received in 2023, it investigated 81 cases, or 38 per cent of them.

This is higher than the average 34 per cent investigated between 2019 and 2022.

CPIB said a report is registered for investigation if the information received is pursuable, which is determined by the quality of information provided.

“Investigative inquiries and intelligence probes by CPIB also uncovered further information that enabled a higher percentage of reports to be registered for investigation,” said the bureau.

Of the cases registered for investigation, 86 per cent were from the private sector and 14 per cent, or 11 cases, were from the public sector. This is similar to figures in 2022, CPIB said.

The public sector cases include the one involving Iswaran, who is facing a total of 35 charges. The former MP in West Coast GRC is the first person to be charged under Section 165 of the Penal Code, which makes it an offence for a public servant to accept gifts from someone involved with him in an official capacity.

He has been accused of taking bribes from billionaire Ong Beng Seng as inducement for advancing the hotel and property tycoon’s business interests in relation to agreements between race promoter Singapore GP and the Singapore Tourism Board.

Iswaran is said to have also obtained items such as a Brompton bicycle, golf clubs and bottles of whisky from Mr Lum Kok Seng, the managing director of property management, interior design and construction company Lum Chang, between November 2021 and November 2022.

Iswaran has indicated that he will fight the charges.

CPIB in 2023 also investigated the rentals of two Ridout Road black-and-white bungalows, which were tenanted to Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam and Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

In the statement, the agency said it launched the probe after receiving

instructions from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on May 17, 2023.

The primary objective was to ascertain if there was any corruption or criminal wrongdoing.

CPIB said it “found no preferential treatment given to the ministers and their spouses, no disclosure of privileged information in the rental process, and no evidence to suggest any abuse of position by the ministers for personal gain”.

However, the bureau discovered an error in the Singapore Land Authority’s public statement, which said that Mr Shanmugam had paid above the guide rent. The monthly rental paid was in fact equal.

CPIB said in its release: “While this has no bearing on the fact that all transactions and communications were completely above board, CPIB dutifully reported this as part of our factual findings.”

In 2023, 111 people were prosecuted in court for offences investigated by the bureau.

Almost all – 99 per cent – of these cases ended with a conviction, which the bureau said shows the quality of its investigation to be able to stand up to scrutiny in court.

One case involved a director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Gilbert Oh Hin Kwan, 45, who pleaded guilty on April 26, 2024, to giving false information to a public servant.

Two other cheating charges will be taken into consideration for his sentencing, which is expected to take place on May 20.

Oh wanted to do a personal favour for a female friend by helping her send her luxury watches from China to Singapore. He asked for his colleague’s help to send the items via the diplomatic bag service.

But a diplomatic bag can only be used for sending official correspondence and items to and from the ministry and its overseas offices, such as embassies or consulates.

When the matter came to light, Oh lied to MFA that the watches belonged to his father. He repeated this when CPIB opened investigations on Jan 19, 2023, but came clean the next day.

Of all the reports received in 2023, 46 per cent were made anonymously.

The bureau investigated 20 out of 98 anonymous reports, assessing their merits based on the information provided. It looks into all corruption reports, including anonymous ones.

To engage the young, it published an illustrated e-book, The Corruption Casebook 2: Hidden Victims Of Corruption, in April. It is available for download on CPIB’s website.

Those with information on corruption cases can call 1800-376-0000 or lodge an e-complaint on the bureau’s website.