Singapore ranked least corrupt nation in Asia-Pacific

Republic tops list for the first time since 2010; it also rises to No. 3 in the world

Nadine Chua

For the first time in 14 years, Singapore emerged as the least corrupt country in the Asia-Pacific region in 2024.

This is according to global anti-graft watchdog Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) report that was released on Feb 11.

This is the first time since 2010 that the Republic has won the accolade, beating out New Zealand, which had held that position for 14 years.

Transparency International's report also ranked Singapore the third-least corrupt nation in the world, which is the Republic's highest position since 2020.

Singapore scored 84 out of a possible 100 on a scale with zero for highly corrupt and 100 for very clean, moving up two spots from the fifth place it achieved in 2023.

The highest score it recorded was 87 in 2012, when the metric was revamped by Transparency International.

According to the anti-graft watchdog's latest report, the CPI ranked 180 countries and territories according to the levels of public-sector corruption perceived by experts and business people.

Denmark, with a score of 90, topped the overall 2024 index for the seventh consecutive year.

The European country's score was followed by Finland (88), Singapore (84) and New Zealand (83).

According to the report, the CPI highlighted the stark contrast between nations with strong, independent institutions and free, fair elections, and those with repressive authoritarian regimes.

For instance, full democracies have a CPI average of 73, while flawed democracies average 47, and non-democratic regimes just 33.

Ms Urantsetseg Ulziikhuu, Asian regional coordinator at Transparency International, told The Straits Times that a high CPI score does not mean that corruption does not exist in a country, rather that there are strong mechanisms in place to prevent and detect it.

When asked how the graft probe of former transport minister S. Iswaran affected Singapore's standing on the CPI, Ms Urantsetseg said: "The case of the transport minister shows how at least his actions brought consequences, which is not a given in many countries."

On Oct 3, 2024, Iswaran was handed a 12-month jail term in a case that saw, for the first time, a former Cabinet minister being sentenced.

Ms Urantsetseg said: "Singapore is at the top of the region due to the fact that the former champions (New Zealand and Australia) have been sliding down the ranking for the past couple of years.

"Singapore's score, on the other hand, has stayed stable in the last few years. This says more about the backsliding in those countries than to changes in Singapore."

In a press statement also issued on Feb 11, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) said Singapore's reputation as one of the least corrupt countries in the world is hard-earned.

Said its spokesman: "Our people continue to hold a strong stance against corruption and will come forward to report wrongdoings to the authorities. CPIB studies all reports and information that may disclose a corruption offence seriously, whether the informant is known or anonymous."

Mr Wilson Ang, head of Asia regulatory compliance and investigations practice at law firm Norton Rose Fulbright, said Singapore's ranking is a noteworthy achievement.

He said it is significant that during a time of geopolitical tensions and upheaval, Singapore has remained steadfast in its efforts to foster a culture of integrity and crack down on corruption, money laundering and other financial crimes.

He added: "Whilst prominent enforcement cases have given rise to questions about illicit conduct taking place in Singapore, the swift and decisive action taken by the Singapore Government sent a clear signal that there is no one above the law and that it would not shy away from enforcing its stringent laws."

According to the CPI, two in three jurisdictions scored below 50 in 2024, with Transparency International noting that this had huge and potentially devastating implications for global climate action.

It said: "Corruption weakens governance structures, undermines law enforcement and diverts critical climate finance intended to reduce emissions and build resilience.

"In nations where corruption is pervasive, transparency in environmental decision-making is often compromised, leading to unfair outcomes and the destruction of natural resources."

Transparency International said powerful corporate interests often shape or block climate policies to favour short-term profits over long-term environmental sustainability.

"This leads to watered-down regulations, delays in the transition to renewable energy and insufficient action to meet international climate commitments," said Transparency International.

It added that without robust national anti-corruption measures, the effectiveness of global climate agreements remains at risk, further jeopardising efforts to combat the climate crisis.

nadinechua@sph.com.sg

Top 10 for 2024

IN THE WORLD

Rank	Country/territory	Score
1	Denmark	90
2	Finland	88
3	**Singapore**	**84**
4	New Zealand	83
5	Luxembourg	81
6	Norway	81
7	Switzerland	81
8	Sweden	80
9	Netherlands	78
10	Australia	77

IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Rank	Country/territory	Score
1	**Singapore**	**84**
2	New Zealand	83
3	Australia	77
4	Hong Kong	74
5	Bhutan	72
6	Japan	71
7	UAE	68
8	Taiwan	67
9	Israel	64
10	South Korea	64

The Corruption Perceptions Index grades countries/territories on a scale of zero for highly corrupt to 100 for very clean.

Source: TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS