

Eradicating Corruption—The Singapore Experience

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I am very honoured to represent Singapore at this prestigious seminar. My paper is on “Eradicating Corruption - The Singapore Experience” and I hope to share with you our experiences in fighting corruption, which has made Singapore one of the cleanest, corruption free countries in the world. In Singapore we have a very strong anti-corruption policy which recognises that corruption control:

- a. has a strategic significance in national development;
- b. provides a source of competitive advantage. Investors are happy doing business if there is an efficient, clean and transparent environment without being encumbered by bribery;
- c. is part and parcel of good governance for the common good of the citizens;
- d. contributes to the meritocratic ideal, levelling the playing field because unchecked corruption has the following detrimental effects;
- e. distorts accepted and cherished values, particularly achievement orientedness and diligence;
- f. undermines fairness and stability in society;
- g. subverts the course of justice and weakens the rule of law especially if bribes are paid to prevent law enforcement, there will be contempt and hostility towards authority

In its relentless fight against corruption we have the following measures in place:

- a. Legislative Measures against Corruption
- b. Administrative Measures
- c. Preventive Guidelines
- d. Action against corrupt government officers
- e. Court Punishment for Corruption
- f. Departmental Punishment for Corruption
- g. Roles of Government Agencies

LEGISLATIVE MEASURES AGAINST CORRUPTION

In 1959, when Singapore attained self-government, we inherited from the British a government service where corruption was quite rampant. Syndicated corruption and greasing the palms of public officers in return for the services was common. Enforcement action then was difficult against the corrupt because of:

- a. weak laws: the offence was non-seizable and the powers provided to the officers of the CPIB were inadequate to enable them to carry out their duties effectively;
- b. gathering of evidence was difficult because of the weak anti-corruption law and this had resulted in many corrupt public officers getting away with their crime;
- c. the people generally were less educated and did not know their rights. They were submissive in their dealings with public officers in authority and were accustomed to unfair treatment by them;
- d. public officers were not adequately paid compared with those in the private sector. Many of them became indebted through lavish lifestyle. Integrity in the public service was therefore lacking and some of the public officers resorted to corruption to make ends meet;
- e. CPIB officers then were drawn from the Singapore Police Force on short secondment. They were not fully committed to combating corruption especially when it involved their fellow police officers. Furthermore, the short

secondment was disruptive as before an investigation could be completed, they were already due for posting.

After independence the political leaders amended the laws to give more powers to the CPIB officers. To win public trust and confidence, the leaders took it upon themselves to set good examples for public officers to follow. They created a climate of honesty and integrity. Some of the examples set were:

- a. they divested themselves from any involvement in financial or commercial ties;
- b. they reported for work earlier than their subordinates.

Besides setting good examples, legislative measures were also taken by the new political leaders to ensure that the anti-corruption law was adequate and provided sufficient punishments for corrupt offenders.

The law was revamped to give more powers to CPIB officers and punishments for corruption offences were enhanced. The law is reviewed regularly to ensure that offenders do not escape from legal punishment and that corruption does not pay. This includes requiring the court to order any person convicted of corruption offences to repay as penalty an amount of money equivalent to the bribe he had accepted. CPIB officers now, besides having all the powers relating to police investigations, are also given other special powers. Under the law, the Public Prosecutor can also, among other things, order the Comptroller of Income Tax to provide information on the offenders to the CPIB.

CORRUPTION, DRUG TRAFFICKING AND OTHER SERIOUS CRIMES (CONFISCATION OF BENEFITS) ACT 1999

The concept that corruption does not pay was further fortified by the Enactment of The Corruption, Drug Trafficking and other serious with power to confiscate the freeze and confiscate properties and assets obtained by corrupt offenders.

ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES

Along with the legislative measures, administrative measures were also taken to reduce the chances of public officers from getting involved in corruption and wrongdoings and making the CPIB more effective. These measures included:

- a. replacing seconded police officers with permanent civilian investigators;
- b. giving the CPIB a free hand to act without fear or favour against anyone irrespective of his social status, political affiliation, colour or creed;
- c. removing opportunities for corruption in government work procedures;
- d. streamlining cumbersome administrative procedures;
- e. slashing down excessive red tape which provides opportunities for corruption;
- f. reviewing public officers' salaries regularly to ensure that they are paid adequately and comparable to that of the private sector;
- g. reminding government contractors at the time when contracts are signed that bribing public officers administering the contracts may render their contracts to be terminated. A clause to this effect forms part of the contract;
- h. a contractor who gives bribe will be debarred for a period of five years from any public contract unless he co-operates fully with the authority.

PREVENTIVE GUIDELINES

Strict guidelines in the form of instructions were laid down in the government instruction manual (Section L of IM No 2) to prevent public officers from getting involved in corruption or wrongdoings. Some of the instructions are:

- a. a public officer cannot borrow money from, or in any way put himself under a financial obligation to any person who is in any way under his official authority or has official dealings with him;
- b. a public officer cannot use any official information to further his private interest;

- c. a public officer is required to declare his assets at his first appointment and subsequently annually;
- d. a public officer cannot engage in trade or business or undertake any part-time employment without approval;
- e. a public officer cannot receive entertainment from members of public;
- f. a public officer cannot accept any share issued by a company offered to him through a private placement without the approval of the Permanent Secretary (Finance) (Public Service).

EDUCATION OF PUBLIC OFFICERS ON CORRUPTION

Parallel with the legislative and administrative measures, regular talks are also given by CPIB officers to public officers especially those in the enforcement agencies on the pitfalls of corruption. Advice is also given to them on how to avoid getting involved in corruption. Furthermore, public officers are also made aware of the Prevention of Corruption Act through the incorporation of the relevant provisions of the Act in the Government Instruction Manuals.

ACTION AGAINST CORRUPT PUBLIC OFFICERS

Depending on the availability of evidence, a corrupt public officer is dealt with in any one of the two ways:

- a. charging him in court if there is sufficient evidence for court prosecution;
- b. charging him departmentally if there is insufficient evidence for court prosecution.

COURT PUNISHMENT FOR CORRUPTION

In Singapore, both the giver and the receiver of a bribe are guilty of corruption and are liable to the same punishment. Any person who is convicted of a corruption offence can be fined up to \$100,000 or sentenced to imprisonment of up to five years or to both. If the offence relates to a government contract or involves a Member of Parliament or a member

of public body, the term of imprisonment can be increased to seven years. Besides fine and imprisonment, the person convicted of corruption offence will be ordered by the court to return the amount of bribe, which he had accepted in the form of a penalty. In addition to the punishment, which the court may impose on a convicted person, the court is also empowered to order the confiscation of the property obtained by corrupt offenders.

DEPARTMENTAL PUNISHMENT FOR CORRUPTION

A public officer who is convicted in court of a corruption offence will also lose his job and if he is a pensionable officer, his pension and other benefits as well. He will also be debarred from any future public appointment.

A public officer who is convicted of a departmental charge may, depending on the severity of the charge, receive one or a combination of the following punishments:

- a. dismissal from the service;
- b. reduction in rank;
- c. stoppage or deferment of increment;
- d. fine or reprimand;
- e. retirement in the public interest.

ROLES OF EXTERNAL AGENCIES IN COMBATING CORRUPTION

The responsibility of combating corruption does not lie with the CPIB alone. Whilst the bureau has been entrusted with the responsibility of investigating cases of corruption, the primary responsibility of prevention of corruption lies with the respective department. A Permanent Secretary of a Ministry is responsible for ensuring that each department under him has a committee to review anti-corruption measures and his responsibilities in combating corruption are incorporated in the Government Instruction Manuals. He is to ensure that reasonable and adequate measures are taken to prevent corrupt practices including:

- a. improving work methods and procedures;
- b. improving cumbersome work methods and procedures to avoid delay in granting permits, licences, etc;
- c. reviewing procedures, which promote corrupt practices to prevent them from occurring;
- d. devising control system to ensure junior officers who are given power to make decision have not abused such powers;
- e. ensuring that supervisors and administrative staff take anti-corruption measures seriously and that they are not lax in checking and reporting their subordinates;
- f. rotating the officers periodically;
- g. ensuring that besides routine checks, surprise checks are carried out systematically and regularly by senior officers as part of their duties and
- h. reviewing anti-corruption measures.

SUCCESS OF CPIB IN COMBATTING CORRUPTION

The bureau has earned the public's confidence and support in its fight against corruption. It is generally regarded as an effective agency and is reputed for its single-minded efficiency which have made Singapore one of the cleanest, corruption free countries in the world. In countries and in 1998 Political and Economic Risk Consultancy ranked Singapore No.1 among eleven countries. CPIB's success can be attributed to the following:

- a. CPIB officers are easily accessible to members of public who seek to give information or to complain corruption;
- b. complaint and information received are attended to speedily and offenders are brought to book;
- c. the anti-corruption law is effective;
- d. a highly literate and sophisticated society which is no longer submissive to authority and readily report corrupt behaviour with no fear of reprisal;
- e. an anti-corruption climate which provides a strong culture against corruption;

- f. a well-paid public service which effectively lessens any compulsion for public officers to get involved in corruption;
- g. the direct supervision of CPIB by the Prime Minister's Office;
- h. members of public perceive CPIB as an effective and credible organisation and are prepared to come forward to assist positively because of its past investigation against prominent personalities.

The role of the CPIB today includes corruption prevention in addition to its original task of investigation. Besides investigation, it also conducts researches into administrative and operating procedures of corruption-prone departments and recommends measures which would reduce opportunities for corruption. It also provides screening services to ensure that those on adverse records are not appointed to key position.

CONCLUSION

No country in the world today can claim to be free from corruption. However, we in Singapore have managed to control this problem quite successfully. The success of fighting corruption in Singapore can be attributed to:

- a. our political leaders who are fully committed to fight against corruption;
- b. the anti-corruption laws which provide sufficient deterrence;
- c. the support of the members of the public as well as senior public officers; and the last, but not the least;
- d. the relentless efforts of the CPIB to investigate all cases of corruption without any fear or favour.