

# Clean, honest govt a key factor in Singapore's progress: President

People's trust, built over decades, has helped the Republic overcome adversities

Jessie Lim

Singapore's strong stance against corruption has been a key factor in its progress, while trust in the government, built over decades, has helped the Republic overcome adversity, said President Halimah Yacob.

A clean and honest government has been one of the city-state's largest competitive advantages, she said, as businesses can flourish when rules are transparent and applied fairly.

Meritocracy and an emphasis on integrity in governance mean Singaporeans have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential while being confident that decisions and policies are made for the public good rather than for private interests, she added.

President Halimah was speaking at the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau's (CPIB) 70th anniversary event, which was held at the Istana on Wednesday evening.

Among those in the 120-strong audience were Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong.

President Halimah said that Singapore today is widely recognised as one of the least corrupt countries in the world.

This year, the Republic came in fourth out of 180 countries and territories and first in Asia in corruption watchdog Transparency International's annual list of least corrupt nations.

Denmark, Finland and New Zealand tied for first place.

But Singapore's low-corruption status was not always the case. Corruption was rampant in colonial Singapore and it was common to give bribes to receive permits and licences.

When the People's Action Party



President Halimah Yacob and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the launch of the new book *Scrupulous, Thorough, Fearless - The CPIB Story*, at the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau's 70th anniversary event at the Istana on Wednesday evening. With them are (from left) Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and CPIB director Denis Tang. Attendees of the event toured an exhibition (below) showcasing CPIB's history. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE



government came to power in 1959, its leaders made it their mission to establish a clean and ef-

ficient government.

To check and punish corruption, CPIB must be scrupulous, thor-

ough and fearless in its investigations, President Halimah said.

It is incumbent on today's lead-

ers and every Singaporean to protect and maintain this strong trust in the system that the pioneer lead-

## WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

The CPIB plays a key role keeping our agencies and institutions honest and clean. Our anti-corruption efforts continue to be well-regarded, and Singapore consistently ranks highly on global surveys of the least corrupt countries in the world. Singaporeans trust that the laws apply to all and are enforced without fear or favour. Because of this never-ending vigilance, we have made ourselves a trustworthy and reliable place to visit, do business and invest in. We should never take this state of affairs for granted.



PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG, in a Facebook post.

ers have painstakingly built up, she said.

Noting how the CPIB has not shied away from taking action against senior government officials such as ministers and senior civil servants, she said the bureau's independence is protected by the Constitution.

"The director of CPIB can go directly to the President should the Prime Minister stop him from investigating any individual under suspicion of corruption.

"This means that CPIB can investigate anyone, without political influence, favour, or fear of reprisals."

Madam Halimah also thanked CPIB's foreign counterparts, and noted how such networks are important for operational cooperation and the exchange of best practices and know-how.

Among those present at the event were anti-corruption officials from Brunei, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Malaysia.

To commemorate CPIB's work over the past 70 years, an orchid named *Papilionanda CPIB* was unveiled at the Istana on Wednesday.

Madam Halimah noted that the orchid traces its lineage to the Republic's national flower, *Vanda Miss Joaquim*, while being closely intertwined with *Aranda Lee Kuan Yew*, an orchid named in tribute to the late founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew in 2015.

"This is very fitting, considering Mr Lee's firm determination to weed out corruption from our way of life," she said.

A new history book that documents Singapore's anti-corruption journey and CPIB's contributions was also launched.

It will be available across select bookstores from Saturday at \$39.59 (inclusive of GST) in soft cover.

In his foreword for the book, *Scrupulous, Thorough, Fearless - The CPIB Story*, PM Lee congratulates CPIB on its 70th anniversary and notes how Singapore's success depends on keeping the nation and society clean and non-corrupt.

CPIB director Denis Tang, who wrote the preface, noted how the organisation would not have been able to fulfil its mission without tough anti-corruption laws put in place and constant vigilance against corruption by the citizenry.

Thanking Yale-NUS College students, who were involved in the book's co-creation, Mr Tang said: "Our youth are our future, and I hope they ensure that the seeds of anti-corruption are always rooted in our society."

jessie@sph.com.sg