

Hsien Loong Says 'We Try Very Hard' To Keep Singapore Free From Corruption

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By Massita Ahmad

SINGAPORE, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- "We try very hard," said Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong when asked how Singapore prides itself as one of the least-corrupt countries in the world.

"It is not easy, but it is necessary to continue making the effort. It helps that we started on the right footing. Right from the beginning when the PAP (People's Action Party) took over in 1959, this was a prime consideration.

"We wanted to run a clean system, a clean civil service and a clean political leadership. We have been quite unsparing in enforcing that," said Lee in an exclusive interview with Bernama at the Istana Monday.

Singapore was the eighth least-corrupt country in the world in the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Berlin-based watchdog Transparency International.

With an overall score of 85 in the 2015 CPI, Singapore was second in Asia out of 168 countries surveyed.

Lee said: "Whoever transgresses, whether it is senior or not, whether it is a civil servant or a minister, we have to investigate and consequences have to follow. That is a very important part of it."

He also said that another very important part of it was the attitudes of the public who had grown to expect this of the government.

"When something goes wrong and somebody did something not quite right, we will often receive a report, maybe anonymous. We will investigate it. If there is something there, then we will pursue it.

"The public attitude is very important. Because without that, if the public accepts that it is a normal way to do business, that if you are in power then these are perks of the office, that will be a very different situation even if we have the laws," he said.

Transparency International's index is based on expert opinions of public sector corruption and ranks countries on a scale from 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 100 (perceived to be very clean).

Denmark, Finland and Sweden were the three least-corrupt countries in the world, according to the index, with Afghanistan, North Korea and Somalia at the very bottom.

The Singapore Prime Minister noted that his government had tried its best to make the pay fair and realistic for civil servants as well as for the ministers "so that we minimise the temptation for somebody to say that I cannot live on my salary, I have got to look after my family.

"In Singapore, there is no reason to say that. You come in, you cannot expect to get rich in the government, but you should not become poor because you had to do public service," he said.

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