

Criticisms will not abate

The Straits Times, 13 January 2006

LAST year saw both praise and criticism heaped on Singapore - and the reasons for criticism are likely to remain, says Institute of Policy Studies chairman Tommy Koh.

At the Singapore Perspectives 2006 seminar yesterday, Professor Koh listed the bouquets received: Singapore was ranked the second freest economy in the world, after Hong Kong, by the Heritage Foundation, and the cleanest and least corrupt country in Asia by Transparency International.

The Republic was also ranked the most globalised country in the world in the 2005 Globalisation Index, and the 22nd wealthiest country by the International Monetary Fund.

However, Singapore also received several criticisms, which Prof Koh elaborated on, saying these were not areas in which Singapore was likely to do much better in years to come. These were media freedom, the death penalty and Singapore's treatment of its 150,000 foreign domestic workers.

Singapore was ranked 140 out of 167 countries for media freedom by Reporters Without Borders. Its application of the death penalty became an issue before the widely reported hanging of Australian drug trafficker Nguyen Tuong Van last month.

Singapore's treatment of its maids also came under fire in a report by Human Rights Watch last month. Prof Koh made four recommendations: Encourage employers to regard their maids as fellow human beings; all maids should have one day off a week and maximum working hours specified by law; maids should have adequate accommodation and food; and make it illegal for them to clean windows in high-rise buildings.