

These are 'Singapore's most trusted'

Today, 26 February 2010

They may be rich and they are certainly famous, but do you trust them?

Fame and trust do not go hand in hand, it seems, according to the results of a poll conducted by *Asian Reader's Digest*.

Almost everyone would know who Taufik Batisah and Hady Mirza are, but the two Singapore Idol winners bring up the rear in the list of 55 of Singapore's most trusted people.

Taufik was placed 54th, and Hady tied with actress Fann Wong for 52nd place in the magazine's first ever Trust Poll. They shared bottom rankings with radio presenter Glenn Ong, who was No 55.

In contrast, actor and host Gurmit Singh was placed 10th.

"I would have thought entertainers like me, especially comedians, would be the least trusted since we are always clowning around," Gurmit told the magazine.

But he was clearly the exception to the rule, tying with entrepreneur Olivia Lum, chief executive officer of Hyflux, in the top 10 placings.

The top spots were dominated by individuals who hold positions of authority, with Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong as Singapore's most trusted person.

But his ranking is not surprising, said the magazine, considering that judges ranked as the third most trusted profession in the poll.

According to Dr Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies: "In Singapore, there has been a consistent trend to rank high court judges at the top of the socio-economic ladder,"

The poll was taken last October from a cross section of 760 Singaporeans, who were asked to rank the shortlisted individuals and professions they had the most faith in. Politicians were omitted as "the general elections have proven the country's leaders already rank highly ..." said the magazine.

The full results are published in the March issue of *Asian Reader's Digest*.

With the exception of second place wheelchair athlete and charity fundraiser Dr William Tan, the rest of the top five individuals are closely associated to the high office they hold within local government bodies.

"The results could be interpreted as a reflection of the public's trust in the state," said Dr Terence Chong, a fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Or as the Asian Reader's Digest said: "To put it simply, we trust them because of the roles they play."

A male respondent in his 40s said of Prof Chan Heng Chee, who is Singapore's ambassador to the United States and who was placed sixth: "She speaks with authority and has represented the country very professionally."

The results also show that how well-known an individual is to the general public does not matter when it comes to trust.

The respondents were allowed to select a "don't know" response when given the individuals to rate. More than 25 per cent did not know who the top five performers were, with CJ Chan scoring 28 per cent in "don't know" responses, Dr Tan with 26 per cent and ambassador-at-large Professor Tommy Koh with 28 per cent.

In contrast, four out of five individuals at the bottom of the list scored below 15 per cent in the same category, indicating that more people know who they are.

Besides Gurmit, writer Catherine Lim and Deirdre Moss, executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), "softened" the tough nature of the top 10, showing that trust was also given to those who come across as "honest, genuine and passionate about their work", said Asian Reader's Digest.

Of Ms Lim, who was once criticised by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong for her political comments, a female respondent in her 30s said: "Her opinion is very direct and honest, and she is not easily intimidated."

The gathering of individuals in "non traditional" professions in the lower ranks also reflect "Singaporeans' rather traditional view of how one gains respect and trust", as Associate Professor Don Ferrin, Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources, Singapore Management University, put it.

Plastic surgeon Dr Woffles Wu and Dr Georgia Lee, a general practitioner with special interest in aesthetics, were placed 47th and 50th respectively, with comedian Mark Lee at No 48, Singapore Idol judge and entertainer/composer Dick Lee at 42, actor and host Allan Wu at 43, former footballers V Sundramoorthy (tying with Dr Lee) at 50, and David Lee at 39.

Gurmit may have bucked the trend because he "has a very local and lovable image" who has "shown himself to be genuine", said Associate Professor Tan Hwee Hoon of the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at SMU. On the other hand, Idols Taufik and Hady "have not achieved very much since the time they won".

Assoc Prof Ferrin said this trend is different from what one would find in the West, "where government and business leaders tend to be viewed with greater scepticism, while entertainment figures can be very respected and influential".