

Public think corruption is rife in S. Korean politics, survey shows

By Kim Young-gyo

SEOUL, Dec. 7 (Yonhap) -- South Koreans hold strong opinions about the extent to which corruption affects political life at home, a global survey showed Thursday.

More than four out of five respondents think graft plays a moderate to large role among the nation's legislators and political parties, according to Transparency International (TI).

In the run-up to Anti-Corruption Day on Saturday, the Berlin-based nongovernmental anti-corruption body released its Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) Thursday.

The TI Global Corruption Barometer is the only worldwide public opinion survey that monitors people's perceptions and experience of corruption, the body said. This year's poll covered 59,000 people in 62 countries.

Although most countries seem to consider corruption a problem in politics, South Korea was one of the top-five cynics, with over 70 percent of respondents voicing the belief that it has a large hand among the country's decision-makers.

Bolivia, Cameroon, Greece and Taiwan held their own politicians in the same light.

On a scale of one to five, respondents in South Korea gave political parties 4.3, the legislature 4.2 and the business sector 3.7. Five represents the maximum level of perceived corruption.

The survey showed that only 14 percent of the South Korean public think their government is effective in combating the problem. Almost half, or 45 percent, think it is not doing a good enough job of eradicating graft, while 41 percent say it is doing nothing at all or even actively encouraging it.

Although the public has yet to be convinced of the government's anti-corruption efforts, South Korea saw less bribery linked to public services in 2006 from a year earlier, the TI said.

According to the survey, public sector bribes in the country halved from last year. Four percent of respondents admitted to paying such bribes in 2005, compared to two percent this year.

"There is a huge gap between what ordinary citizens in South Korea perceive and what they personally experience," said Kang Sung-goo, secretary general of the TI's South Korea chapter.

"This is probably because people identify the highest class as the most corrupt."

The TI urged the government to further demonstrate its international commitment to fighting graft by ratifying the UN Convention against Corruption without delay.

It also released last month the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), focusing on experts' views. South Korea scored 5.1 out of a full 10, and was ranked 42nd out of 163 countries.

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