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Four S'pore think-tanks among Asia's top 30

By Kor Kian Beng

THE S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) has been ranked third-best among more than 1,000 Asian think-tanks in a study conducted last year by the University of Pennsylvania.

Three other Singapore think-tanks also snagged top 30 positions in a ranking of 40 leading Asian think-tanks.

They are the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (seventh), Singapore Institute of International Affairs (15th), and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (29th).

RSIS dean Barry Desker said the ranking was a recognition by the global policy and academic community of the institutes' contribution to policy and academic research:

'The ranking is a milestone in RSIS' growth as a professional graduate school of international affairs and a leading think tank in the region.'

Named after Singapore's late first generation leader S. Rajaratnam, RSIS focuses on issues related to security and stability in the Asia-Pacific, and the implications for Singapore and the region.

The Global 'Go-To Think Tanks' ranking was the fourth since 2006 by the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tank and Civil Societies Programme. It aims to identify top think-tanks through surveys with over 300 scholars, policy-makers and think-tank experts.

The criteria includes academic reputation, success in generating innovative policy ideas, and access to elites in the areas of policymaking, media and academia.

The study gave worldwide and regional rankings. Asian think-tanks were ranked for the first time in 2008. That was when the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies - a centre within the RSIS - was ranked 10th.

Topping the latest ranking for Asia was the Japan Institute of International Affairs. Globally, the top think-tank among the 6,300 covered was The Brookings Institution in the United States.

Associate Professor Scott Fritzen, vice-dean (academic affairs) at the LKY School, said its ranking was remarkable given that it was launched only in 2004.

'It is a sign of the school's success and growth in developing deep expertise in several policy areas, such as anti-corruption and water governance,' he said.

SIIA chairman Simon Tay said he was happy with the 15th placing for what is one of Singapore's smallest think-tanks.

He underlined SIIA's strengths by suggesting a twist on its acronym: Small, Independent, (takes) Initiative and Action.

And although Iseas' latest ranking was a drop from its seventh place in 2008, its director K. Kesavapany said:

'Iseas has been as productive as last year. We leave it to an external organisation to rank us based on its chosen criteria.'

He added that the high ranking for the four local think-tanks 'reflects the intellectual capital being accumulated here'.

