

Shameful state of our loos spreads to malls

I AM writing about an emerging issue in which all Singaporeans are stakeholders: a decade-long, ongoing deterioration in the condition of our public toilets.

Recently, a friend of mine had a painful digestive upset and found, to his horror, that the McDonald's toilet had no paper and was in poor condition. So he paid 10 cents to use a nearby Chinatown Mall toilet. He went in to find out there was no toilet paper, a foul odour and much debris on the floor. I could have told him this particular toilet had not restocked toilet paper in years.

By the time he had bought several wads of toilet paper from the toilet guard, he suffered a serious and highly embarrassing accident. The lack of toilet paper aside, this mall toilet has been in a deplorable condition for years.

My friend asked the mall manager why the mall did not stock toilet paper; and what financial gain was realised by subjecting customers to this indignity. The manager apologised but then tried to deflect responsibility, say-

ing that the firm the mall outsources maintenance of toilets to was responsible. Outsourcing or not, as business or social hosts, we should be gracious enough to supply even passers-by with well-stocked toilets.

Recently, I encountered a strong odour of urine in The Esplanade men's room. I solve such problems in just five minutes by washing down the toilet with bleach or PineSol diluted in water, yet it has persisted in The Esplanade men's room for a long time.

I also noticed that malls in Ang Mo Kio, Yishun, Geylang and (in one case) even

Orchard Road that used to stock toilet paper 10 years ago now no longer do so. In some cases, a few stopped putting toilet paper in their stalls around 2001. Others picked up the habit more recently.

Recently, my nephew visited Singapore and he too commented on the fact that some mall toilets are becoming decrepit and he can no longer take toilet paper for granted in parts of the HDB Hub or in some MRT stations.

Singapore is known around the world for pioneering clean streets, clean toilets and clean public spaces in Asia. It would be a shame if we let the trivial cost of keeping toilets clean and well stocked destroy a hard-won reputation.

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