

Toilet talk

Loos are big business, so why can't Singaporeans keep them clean?

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SINGAPORE – Providing countries with basic toilet solutions is big business amounting to US\$1 trillion (\$1.38 trillion), said participants at the World Toilet Summit and Expo held here. The catch? Getting the citizens who are the targets of such efforts to understand why they should use toilets.

"Unlike water, which is needed for basic living and survival, people demand that. But in the case of sanitation, people just go and defecate in the open, they don't demand it from their policy-makers to give them good sanitation," said Dr K E Seetharaman, director of the Institute of Water Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Each year, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene account for nearly 94 per cent of the 4 billion cases of diarrhoea that the World Health Organization estimates occurs worldwide.

And industry players say, more needs to be done to reach out to the nearly 2.5 billion who still do not have access to modern sanitation.

What is needed immediately: Sanitation facilities for 500 million households.

Said Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Lim Swee Say at the summit yesterday: "This global sanitation challenge can only be overcome if the global community

learns to put every dollar, every idea and every drop of water to good use. It will take a long time, but it can be done if there is enough attention, efforts and determination."

Citing Singapore's efforts in water management and sanitation development, he said: "Today we are proud to have one of the most modern sanitation (systems) in the world, with 100-per-cent coverage of households and public places."

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But, Mr Jack Sim, founder of the World Toilet Organisation, says the challenge for Singaporeans is a different one.

"People have been asking me how come Singapore can host Formula 1 but can't keep the coffee shop toilet clean," he said, adding that what was needed was enforcement, encouragement, and "a culture where people enjoy going to and respect the toilet".

Also at the summit, being held here for the second time in nine years, is a whole range of cleaning industry products providing business opportunities for the sector.