



THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SMELLY: A clean toilet (left) is the basic condition for a gracious society, said one MP.

CIVIC GROUP TO TACKLE PROBLEM

Watch out, litter-bugs...

A COMMUNITY-BASED civic group, the Anti-Littering Steering Committee, was set up recently to come up with fresh ideas to nip the old problem of littering.

Headed by Mr Wong Yew Kwan, the former Parks and

Recreation Commissioner and avid nature enthusiast, it will have 20 civic-minded members from the private and public sectors and some non-governmental organisations.

Environment Minister

Lee Yock Suan revealed this during yesterday's debate on the estimates for the Ministry of Environment.

He was asked by Mr Heng Chiang Meng (Cheng San GRC) how he planned to go beyond legislation and Cor-

rective Work Orders to keep Singapore green.

He said the committee has already met twice earlier this year and is now in the process of coming up with new ideas and perspectives on how to solve the problem.

Life-sciences push: More docs needed?

SINGAPORE'S push into the life sciences may lead the Government to review the intake of doctors for clinical trials and research, said Health Minister Lim Hng Kiang yesterday.

He was responding to a question by Dr Lily Neo (Kreta Ayer-Tanglin GRC) about whether Singapore is short of doctors yet again, and why it still adhered to

the policy of restricting the number of recognised universities for medical students.

He said his ministry will take into consideration the new needs of the burgeoning life-sciences industry.

"I don't rule out the need for more doctors from both our local intakes, local training, as well as from overseas sources," he said.

But for now, he said, the number of doctors here is enough.

Singapore can recruit what it needs from the 20 overseas universities registrable under the Singapore Management University.

Doctors who do not graduate from this approved list of universities can be put either on temporary or conditional registration here.

He added that the intake of medical students at the National University of Singapore has increased — from 150 per year in 1993 to 200 today — to meet the needs of a bigger Singapore population.

The quota for foreign-trained doctors have also increased from 50 to 80 per year in that same period.

AT THE HELM: Former parks chief

THE former Parks and Recreation Commissioner, Mr Wong Yew Kwan, will head the anti-littering committee.

An avid nature enthusiast, Mr Wong will lead a group drawn from the private and public sectors, and non-governmental organisations.

We want loos 'good enough to have tea in'

That's how clean the toilets in Korea are, said Environment Minister Lee Yock Suan. ENV will chair a committee to help S'pore get closer to this ideal

By IRENE NG

GARBAGE, sewage and stench of all kinds received an airing in Parliament yesterday, with the high point being the Environment Minister's dream of having tea in the toilet.

Sniff not at the idea. That is how clean the toilets in South Korea are reputed to be.

Earlier, during the debate over the ministry's budget estimates, MP Ang Mong Seng (Bukit Gombak) had observed that Korean toilets are so clean that they have become tourist attractions.

The same cannot be said about public toilets here, he lamented, and urged that the toilets be upgraded and fitted with the latest gizmos, such as automated taps.

A clean toilet, he asserted, is "the basic condition for a gracious society".

Agreeing, Environment Minister Lee Yock Suan added, somewhat wistfully, that he had heard that people could have tea in toilets in Korea.

"Whether we can reach their standard, I am not sure," he added. But the ministry has a vision, and it is contained in the guidebook, Better Public Toilets — Design and Maintenance.

Its glossy cover features what looks like a cushy toilet that could double as a cafeteria. "Hopefully, one day, all our public toilets will look like this," he said.

His ministry is chairing a committee to "give this a special push", he said, adding

that toilets in all 34 food centres will be upgraded.

"Something as mundane as a toilet is actually very important. It plays a very important part in our lives and when people renovate their houses nowadays, they pay a lot of attention to the toilet, and I think rightly so."

There was also debate on how to flush out litterbugs in HDB estates.

'Something as mundane as a toilet is actually very important... When people renovate their houses nowadays, they pay a lot of attention to the toilet...'

— Environment Minister
Lee Yock Suan

The penalties do not seem to be effective, not even corrective work orders, sighed several MPs. Public places are clean only thanks to paid workers.

A greater sense of civic consciousness needs to be inculcated, said Mr Kenneth

Chen (Hong Kah GRC).

Opposition MP Low Thia Kiang (Hougang) asked for residents to be empowered to nab litterbugs.

Mr Lee said he was not sure if that would work. This power was offered to grass-roots leaders, who promptly gave it back.

They, he said, feared having their names dragged in the mud by neighbours. Then there is the fear of getting a bloody nose "or something worse", he noted.

Foul things and foul hands occupied opposition MP Chiam See Tong (Potong Pasir). He complained about rubbish trucks coming late in private estates, leaving cats, dogs and rats to run riot with the rubbish.

He also observed that most rubbish collectors do not wear gloves.

He commented: "I do not know whether those rubbish collectors take on second jobs as food handlers or at hawker centres. If so, then they need a lot of washing of their hands when they take on their second jobs at hawker centres."

As for Associate Prof Low Seow Chay (Chua Chu Kang), he related how he was once almost suffocated by exhaust fumes from two-stroke motorcycles.

This was when he got into a motorcycle lane at the Causeway checkpoint by mistake. He choked even more when he saw that the bikes bore Singapore licence plates.

Mr Lee said a video camera is now used to record the colour of the smoke from motorbikes: "Under the regulations, if there is visible smoke, then it is an offence."

Mr Lee wrapped up by saying he welcomed further ideas to stamp out littering, and assured members these would not go down the drain.