

# Improve the lot of 'invisible' workers

I refer to the article, "You're so old. Why are you cleaning toilets?" (The Sunday Times, May 4).

My father has been working as a toilet cleaner for the past 13 years. He is like cleaner Palaniammal Sengodan, who had no choice but to take this job.

My father, who did not have a formal education, was retrenched from his previous job. He had to become a cleaner in order to support a family of four – including two school-going children.

His basic monthly pay of \$700 in 1995 was barely enough to support the family, but we managed.

Now, 13 years later, his basic pay of \$750 is still supporting the family – with me in university and my brother in polytechnic. Fortunately, his basic pay is supplemented by an overtime pay of about \$200.

My father never complains and works very hard because he knows that this is the only job he can do. He does not enjoy the protection of unions, as cleaning companies are not unionised. As a result, he is sometimes subjected to unfair treatment from his employers.

Toilet cleaners like him are taken for granted by many Singaporeans. Although my father has received compliments for his work from foreigners and locals alike, he also has to bear with sometimes unreasonable behaviour from others.

Cleaners are the "invisible" workers in this country. We pride ourselves on being a clean nation,



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but this is due to the hard work put in by these workers. Yet, they often do not receive recognition for their efforts, and many Singaporeans continue to dirty the environment without any care.

Cleaners are often lowly paid, and many of them are breadwinners. Yet their basic salaries have not kept up with inflation rates. A big proportion of their pay is spent on basic necessities, and the prices of these have risen greatly.

Cleaners are often not represent-

ed by unions and their welfare is not guaranteed. Thus, they will not be able to find help when they encounter problems with their employers.

I applaud the article for highlighting the issues faced by these invisible workers, which many Singaporeans are not aware of. I hope more can be done for this group of people who have contributed much to our nation.

Lester Lam