

Singapore loo report: Three out of five stars

By GWENDOLYN NG

THE report card on public toilets in Singapore is out, and the verdict: three out of five stars, said the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS).

"There's still a long way to go; many toilets in Singapore are even below the three-star rating," said association president Tan Puay Hoon.

Ms Tan was speaking at the release of the Inter-Agency Working Committee Report on public restrooms yesterday.

Work for the report started in 2008 and RAS sought the opinions of the public, toilet

cleaners, cleaning-service providers and their clients on the standards of public toilets in Singapore.

With the less-than-satisfactory situation of loos here, RAS hopes that Singapore can reach the standard of those in Japan, which is known for its clean public toilets.

Citing the pristine conditions of Japan's public toilets, RAS founder Jack Sim said: "Even with the high traffic at Tokyo Railway Station, for example, the toilets are clean."

And the work ethics of public-toilet cleaners in Japan are worth emulating, he added.

"They take pride in their job, celebrating toilet cleaning as a craft. They will polish their toilets till they are satisfied," said Mr Sim.

In contrast, toilet cleaning in Singapore is seen as a dirty job, shunned by Singaporeans.

Mr Sim estimates that three quarters of the toilet-cleaning workforce here are made up of foreigners.

One of the report's recommendations is to improve the image of toilet cleaning through better welfare and recognition.

The key problem lies in the low wages, said Mr Sim. He estimates that toilet cleaners here earn an average of \$600 a month. He hopes to raise it to about \$1,000.

"It's not that Singaporeans are choosy. It's simply because the pay for toilet cleaners is too low," said Mr Sim.

One way of justifying the pay rise, said RAS, is to send toilet cleaners for skills upgrading.

Cleaning company Shiners Facilities, for instance, pays cleaners who have certification an additional \$150 to \$200, thus bumping up their take-home salary to about \$1,200 a month.

As a form of recognition, the company also gives out shopping vouchers worth \$100 each to the best cleaners - picked by the company's clients - every quarter.

Shiners Facilities managing director John Selvan said that cleaners who receive above market-rate pay and recognition tend to perform better. They also stay in the job longer.

Yesterday, RAS also launched Loo@Heartlands, a campaign to raise awareness of restroom etiquette.

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