

# Coffeeshop owners welcome toilet grants

**They are eager to find out details of the Government's proposed one-off grants to upgrade restrooms**

By NEO HUI MIN

WHEN the Choh Dee Place group took over the coffeeshop at Block 232, Ang Mo Kio Street 22, two months ago, it renamed it AMK 81 Food House, spruced it up and built an outdoor extension.

It also spent about \$12,000 re-tiling the two toilets and installing a new sink and toilet bowls.

It used its own money, said the coffeeshop's manager, Mr Peter Koh. But if it decided to renovate another coffeeshop, it might get government help.

The Government is considering one-off grants to help upgrade coffeeshop toilets, Acting Environment Minister Lim Swee Say said on Monday at the opening of the inaugural World Toilet Summit 2001 at Singapore Expo.

The amount of grant or subsidy has not been decided, but it would probably be some form of matched funding.

The programme could start early next year.

The coffeeshop owners interviewed were very happy with the news but wanted to know more. The Straits Times spoke to the managements of

two coffeeshop chains, four individual coffeeshop owners and the Kheng Keow Coffee Bar Owners Association.

The association and shop owners said they would like more aid, and everyone had questions and suggestions.

Mr Wong Yeh Yuh, chairman of the 300-member association, said: "Because of the economic slowdown, some of these may need more financial help."

He would like to see coffeeshops in HDB blocks being upgraded get help first.

"Then the upgrading can be done to both the HDB blocks and the coffeeshops there," he said.

He hopes the Environment Ministry will consult coffeeshop associations and chains before spelling out the details.

A spokesman for the S11

chain of 23 coffeeshops said it was too early to comment.

"We would like to know what kind of upgrading the minister is referring to. Is it in terms of facilities or maintenance?" she asked.

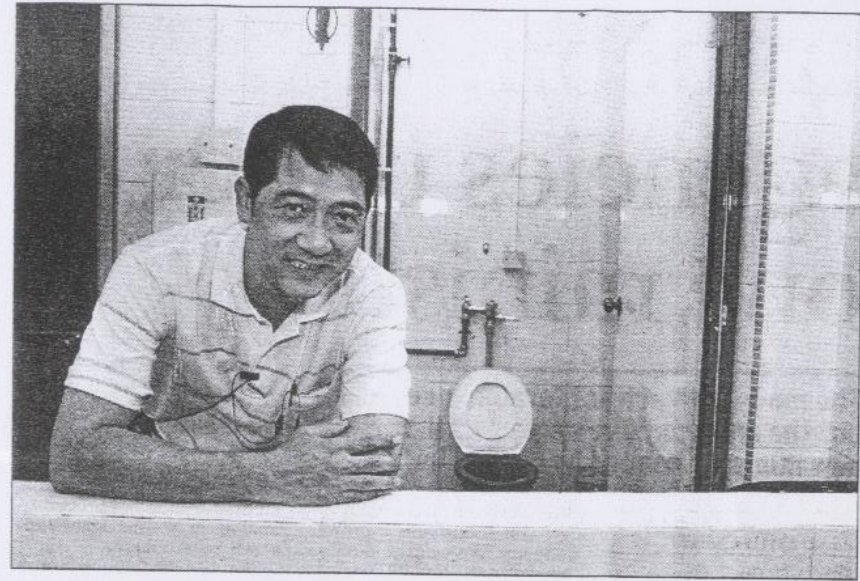
Coffeeshop owners said it costs between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to upgrade a toilet.

And some asked why help was restricted to toilet upgrading.

A coffeeshop owner said: "It's strange to just upgrade the toilets when the rest of the coffeeshop looks old. The customer won't even think of using the toilet. He will presume that the toilet is a mess."

He said he was reluctant to upgrade the whole coffeeshop as "it costs a lot, at least \$100,000 to \$200,000".

A senior operations manager with NTUC Foodfare,



WONG MAYE-E

**The new toilets** being shown off by AMK 81 manager Koh. If the owners want to upgrade toilets in other outlets they may get help from the Government.

which runs 16 coffeeshops, said upgrading toilets was only a small step to keeping them clean. The chain spends up to \$1,000 a month just on toilet repair work.

"There are some people who just take pleasure in vandalising toilets," said the manager, Mr Lim Khee Fang.

"There have been cases of newspapers thrown into toilet

bowls, toilet sensors damaged deliberately, toilet paper thrown on the floor and people caught doing their laundry.

"The point is, public education is still most important."