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# Hey S'porean, would you do these jobs?

**Foreigners are willing to do what locals won't even with more pay, say some employers**

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WHEN entrepreneur Adam Khoo wrote a blog entry titled "The Expats Will Rule Singapore", he did not expect the flurry of hate mail that followed.

Mr Khoo, 35, co-founder and executive chairman of Adam Khoo Learning Technologies Group, had described how, when he advertised to hire a marketing executive, more than 60 per cent of applicants were foreigners.

He wrote that some of the foreigners had master's degrees and were willing to work for less than \$2,000 a month, compared to local fresh graduates who asked for at least \$2,500.

In Mr Khoo's blog post, he wrote: "They (foreigners) know that if they can come in and learn and work hard, they will eventually climb up and earn a lot more."

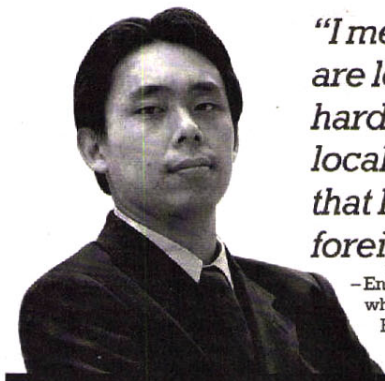
"They are willing to invest in themselves, pay the price for future rewards. Sometimes I wonder how some of the locals are going to compete with this."

The blog post, written on 16 Dec last year, spurred at least 20 netizens to post angry comments on his blog.

One netizen wrote: "Adam, you're a local who hires cheap FTs (foreign talent) and then keeps the savings for yourself."

Mr Khoo's blog post was also copied and flamed on forums like hardwarezone.com.sg and sgforums.com.

But Mr Khoo explained, in an interview with The New Paper on Sunday, that his



*"I meant that foreigners are less picky and more hardworking than locals... It doesn't mean that I prefer hiring foreigners to locals."*

— Entrepreneur Adam Khoo explaining what he meant in his blog post "The Expats Will Rule Singapore"

words were taken out of context.

The father of two young girls said that he felt foreigners were less picky than locals, and he was worried about how his daughters and other young Singaporeans would be able to compete with them in future.

He added that it didn't mean he preferred hiring foreigners.

Mr Khoo said that his office here has about 90 staff and only three are foreigners.

He said: "I'd still pay a local more than a foreigner if the local is able to generate more value for my company."

Mr Khoo said that when Law Minister K Shanmugam said at a dialogue with Yew Tee residents last Sunday that foreign workers were not stealing jobs from Singaporeans, but were really doing jobs shunned by Singaporeans, it struck a chord with him.

He said: "I understand this (foreign workers here) is a sensitive issue so some people are upset. It's no point getting angry because nothing will come out of it."

While Mr Khoo has no difficulty hiring Singaporeans, employers in other sectors la-

ment the reluctance of Singaporeans to take up certain jobs.

Restaurateur Eldwin Chua feels bad about hiring foreigners as chefs and waiting staff.

But the owner of the Paradise Group of restaurants claims he has no choice — his attempts to hire and retain Singaporean staff have mostly failed.

The Paradise Group pays local waiting staff \$1,500 to \$1,600 a month, compared to \$1,200 to \$1,600 for foreigners, depending on their experience.

Mr Chua said: "I offer higher salary to locals because I'm encouraging them to take up the jobs."

"Singaporeans complain so much about Chinese nationals working as waiters and waitresses.

"But do they know that when locals take up the jobs, many of them turn up for just two days before quitting, because they can't take the long hours of standing?"

The Paradise Group has 200 waiters and waitresses in its eight restaurants, and 90 per cent are either permanent residents or for-

eigners from China and Malaysia.

Last Monday, SBS Transit announced it would increase salaries of new bus captains to \$1,375 a month, up from the current \$1,196, in an attempt to recruit more Singaporeans.

Together with other allowances, they can earn more than \$1,900 a month in their first year of employment.

SBS Transit has 5,500 bus captains, of which only 38 per cent are Singaporeans.

Its executive director, Mr Gan Juy Kiat said: "Over the years, we've seen fewer and fewer Singaporeans join us as bus captains."

Many Singaporeans also do not wish to work as cleaners, seeing it as a "dirty" job, said Mr Steven Kunasegaran, owner of L & J Maintenance.

## How much to wash toilets?

Mr Kunasegaran, who has been in business for 16 years, said: "I advertise for cleaners in the papers but when Singaporean applicants call up, they ask about the salary and whether they need to wash the toilets."

"Of course toilets have to be cleaned. And when I say so, they never contact me again."

The Employment & Employability Institute (e2i), the National Trades Union Congress' one-stop job-matching and training centre, echoed the employers' sentiments.

Its spokesman said jobs that have few Singaporean takers are cleaners, low-end manufacturing production operators, low-end retail assistants and food & beverage service staff.

She said: "Based on today's labour market situation, any job which pays \$800 to \$900 a month, requires workers to perform shift and weekend duties, and travel to far corners of Singapore will have a low take-up, if at all."

"This is simply because they no longer reflect the market and workers have better alternatives."