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'Rats' make clean sweep of Esplanade

By [Arti Mulchand](#)

RATS have descended on The Esplanade's spiky sunshades. Fortunately, however, they are not of the rodent variety.



Standing on the edge of one of The Esplanade's spiky sunshades, the team of rope-access technicians - or Rats -- prepares to abseil down one of the centre's durian-like domes. -- CHEW SENG KIM

Ten rope-access technicians, or Rats, are giving the arts centre's 7,139 sunshades and 10,508 outer glass panels some spit and polish ahead of its Oct 12 opening.

Dust from the construction of the centre, its proximity to traffic and the salt-laden sea air have sullied the two durian-like domes.

The clean-up is part of the \$600-million centre's contract with the construction company. The operation, which started in June, is expected to be completed by Sept 25.

Weather permitting, the 10 technicians involved can clean about 320 panels a day.

They use what they call the 'Spiderman method'. Working top-down, they rappel down the building and attach themselves at various fixed points. This frees their hands to scrub away the grime with water and light detergent.

Mr Conrad Sahetapy, 52, managing director at Singa Management and Cleaning Service, which is supplying the Rats, said: 'Because of its unique shape, [The Esplanade](#) is the most difficult building we have done.'

Navigating the centre's prickly thorns is clearly no walk in the park. Not only do the Rats have to contend with the forces of nature, like the rain and gusty winds, but the risk of injury is also high.

Dangers include falling from a great height, as well as getting cut by the sharp aluminium sunshades.

It took Mr Sahetapy some time to find an insurance company willing to insure the Rats. He eventually managed to insure them for \$500,000 each, but only after forking out premiums of \$3,800.

Mr Hendrosisworo Endrawaluja, both a Rat and site foreman, said: 'We have to get the men down if it rains or they may become lightning conductors, plus it gets quite slippery when it's wet.'

'But, still, it's a great feeling. You get fresh air, you can see everything... and it's something most other people will never get to do.'