

# Competitors snapping up senior CAAS staff

**Airport talent sought after in booming aviation industry**

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GLOBAL headhunters scouting for airport talent to support a booming aviation industry are casting lures for Changi Airport staff – who are biting.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) has lost about 10 senior and mid-management staff in the last few months.

They include several engineers who have quit to join competitors in India, the Middle East, Europe and the United States.

Among the key people who have left are Mr Benedict Oon, former director of development and engineering; Mr James Tong, who was the No. 2 man in airport retail; and Mr Joseph Fernandez, who used to head the airport emergency service.

Even Mr Fernandez's replacement, Mr Ryan Tay, has quit, as has Mr Teng Hwee Onn, the third-highest-ranking officer in the engineering department, The Straits Times understands.

Changi Airports International (CAI), the investment and consultancy arm of the CAAS, has also lost at least two people recently. One was a vice-president and the other, a senior manager.

Among the "poaching" companies is India's infrastructure giant GMR Group, which is leading the consortium that has clinched the deal to build and run new airports in New Delhi and Hyderabad.

In March, the company hired a Singapore recruitment firm to fill 15 key positions in airport management and opera-

tions as well as ground handling. When contacted, GMR declined to say how many former Changi Airport employees it has reeled in so far.

Apart from GMR, companies with airport projects have also hired former CAAS engineers.

Replying to queries from The Straits Times, a CAAS spokesman said: "Given the buoyant aviation scene, the global search for aviation-related talent is expected to intensify.

"We are aware that a few of our officers have been approached by other aviation-related companies."

CAI's chief executive Chow Kok Fong, noting a global surge of interest in airport privatisation, said this means more airports and companies will be competing for the same pool of people, "so yes, we do compete very hard globally to hire and retain staff".

The key to doing that with top talent lies in recognising and rewarding good performance through both monetary and non-monetary rewards, the CAAS spokesman said.

CAAS staff received salary hikes this year, following the company's annual salary review.

Those contacted by The Straits Times said that while the increase was apparently not enough to make some want to stay, many were quite happy to have been given better increments than civil servants, about two-thirds of whom had salary jumps of between 3 and 5 per cent in April.

Industry watchers describe the exodus of Changi Airport staff as a happy problem.

Of CAAS staff being lured away, its spokesman said: "This is evidence that CAAS is recognised internationally as a world-class organisation and our people are of value to the international industry."

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