

S'pore publishing boss asks for sex in e-mails to employees and job applicants. He tells 23-year-old job seeker:

# BE MY SPECIAL 'DESIGNER' GIRLFRIEND



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**H**E E-MAILED a prospective employee, asking her to be his "special designer girlfriend".

In another e-mail to a group of his employees, he offered himself for "sex relief".

Mr Shankar Venkataraman, 45, who owns a publishing firm, sees nothing wrong in sending such e-mails to staff and job applicants.

But the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices disagrees. It has denounced his indecent proposals as "inappropriate and unacceptable". (See report on facing page.)

One woman who applied for a job with his company was so outraged by his brazen come-on and subsequent lack of remorse she contacted The New Paper on Sunday.

Mary (not her real name) had applied for a graphic designer position at eShan Publishing in January.

The 23-year-old, a trained graphic designer, was offered a job soon after.

But her joy turned to shock when she got an e-mail from Mr Venkataraman asking her to be his "special designer girlfriend".

She recalled: "I sent out my resume and the owner of the publishing company e-mailed me back, asking to meet me."

"I met him. He seemed like a normal guy and gave me encouraging comments about my portfolio."

Several days later, Mary e-mailed Mr Venkataraman with an idea for a publication that his company was about to launch.

He replied to say he liked her idea. But she was horrified to read the rest of his e-mail.

It read: "I do hope that you are perfectly single... I have a lots (sic) in store for a roman-

tic partner, for I do not know whether you would understand, that certain creativity too requires that proximity and feel.

"I am sure you know that creativity does not happen under office environment or employer-employee setting. I will soon be starting to travel... so I do wish to have you as my special 'designer' girlfriend and travel companion."

Mr Venkataraman added that he hoped, through his publications, to promote open relationships in society.

Mary, who is currently working as a temp with Singapore Press Holdings, said she was "disgusted" by his request and sent an e-mail politely rejecting his romantic overtures.

She replied that she regarded him as a potential boss and requested some "decency" in his behaviour.

But Mr Venkataraman was undeterred.

He wrote in another e-mail: "'Decency' and 'respect'... are deterrents to creativity... it builds a communication gap, in turn affecting the creativity. In my own finding, creativity requires that 'dirtyness' to be born..."

## Predicted her response

"As I anticipated, your response too was predicted (sic) in a world filled with norms... But I feel good that a channel is (sic) been created and that I chose to be 'indecent' early, so that no undue decency builds up and obstructs in future."

Mr Venkataraman's company employs three women and four men, The New Paper on Sunday understands.

Mary said: "I spoke to one of his employees, who put me in touch with a female colleague who said she had also received e-mails containing sexual propositions."

The woman declined to be interviewed as she is still working in the company, but gave The New Paper on Sunday permission to use excerpts of her e-mail correspondence with Mr Venkataraman.

In one e-mail broadcast to a group of his employees, Mr Venkataraman repeatedly referred to himself as the company's "captain".

He stressed the importance of trust among co-workers, and urged those with an "uncomfortable state of mind" to leave the company.

He wrote: "I would also not hesitate to disclose that our 'Physical Sexual feeling' is nothing but a natural urge..."

"To either sex, the partner is just an outlet or a companion, and its like going to pee together or like having a coffee together... A spouse is nothing but an attached bathroom or outlet."

He went on to offer himself as an "outlet for all incontinence".

He said: "I have no qualms to announce that I am available for SEX relief, for I do envisage that as members of this vessel, we may get a special treatment and its best we keep things between ourselves, rather than looking for an outside avenue, which can endanger the journey."

"So anyone is free to press the 'attendant' button on the vessel for this."

In another e-mail he wrote to a group of his company's writers, he said he was in "dire need" of a soulmate and travel companion.

Mr Venkataraman signed off the e-mails as eShan, his pseudonym.

The New Paper on Sunday contacted him via e-mail and asked if he saw anything wrong in trying to initiate romantic and sexu-

al relationships with his employees through his e-mails.

We also asked Mr Venkataraman, an Indian national with permanent residency here, if he felt Singaporean women were too conservative.

He did not reply directly to the questions. Instead, he challenged us to publish his e-mails.

He said: "It's good to note that some seeds I have sown are showing results... How about you publish those e-mails and this e-mail of yours, and I reply through my publication?"

When probed further, he said: "Your questions... show that you have closed your mind in many ways, and your picture is complete."

## 'Finished family life'

In another e-mail to The New Paper on Sunday, he described himself as "someone who has finished 'family life', who has chosen a career in publishing to "break all traditional barriers".

Refusing to answer our questions, he said they were "media blackmail" and "extortion of information by ransom".

He added: "Your questions are absurd and narrow-minded, and is (sic) only reflection of how humanity has degraded and thus life itself..."

"But from my e-mails you can see that I am not into cheapsex sex. I proposed to the girl in question, since I found her having the potential and talents for some of my creations that are planned."

He said he was merely exercising his right to propose. "I just did not make a standard proposal, as it was after a few exchanges which gave me the intuition that the person has the capacity for elevated thinking."