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Civic-mindedness key to cleanliness

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IT has been said that a word of rebuke is worse than a thousand blows to a man of understanding. Certainly, the reprimand by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself on the littering habits of Malaysians should be an effective warning to every authority, institution and individual across the nation to buck up and keep this beautiful nation clean.

Since when have Malaysians picked up this habit of throwing at random? Did we not grow up with a strict sense of discipline and civic-mindedness.

Why are we still lacking in civic consciousness after 40 years of Independence? Why aren't the older generation setting the right example and why do we not see our youth following that exemplary path?

On a recent visit to my daughter's school - before the publicity of our Prime Minister's rebuke - I found the front waiting area shockingly covered with litter. But just nearby was a row of empty litter bins!

I commented on the mess to the girls around but it fell on deaf ears. They gave "It-wasn't-me-who-did-it" look. If this is what one finds in an all-girls school, I dread to think of what it would be like elsewhere.

The sense of civic-mindedness must be sorely lacking. One does not ask "Who did it?" Nor does one answer "It wasn't me!", but one should naturally and automatically pick it up when we see litter in our midst. One wonders whether the values of the next generation will be the same as ours, when cleanliness, honesty, hardwork and perseverance were recognised virtues.

It seems to me that being messy and clad shabbily is being groovy.

Laws and hefty fines is not the answer towards a clean nation. It is the creation of the healthy, wholesome, civic-minded citizen that guarantees that. Such citizens will never litter, even if you beat them or bribe them.