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It's high time we instilled good and clean habits

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HOUSING and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh's directive to local authorities to review their cleanliness and beautification programmes and determine if they have met the desired objectives is long overdue.

Dr Ting's directive came in the wake of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's comments that the lifestyle of Malaysians did not reflect the nation's status as a middle-income country.

The Prime Minister has expressed his dissatisfaction over the lack of cleanliness in public places, such as toilets, hawker centres and flats.

Our local councils need to upgrade the level of professionalism in their respective organisations.

The Cabinet has just accepted a proposal to restructure the 96 local authorities in Peninsular Malaysia to make them more efficient.

What is even more important is for these local councils to set up their own audit teams or committees to monitor, examine and supervise their financial management. This would make all local councils more transparent.

These are measures which have been eagerly awaited by the ratepayers.

Among the many pressing issues facing the local authorities is cleanliness.

A cursory assessment of most local authorities' efforts at ensuring cleanliness and maintenance reveals that there is still room for improvement.

At a time when much has been spoken about cleanliness and the inculcation of good habits, it is appropriate to focus on our public toilets.

Toilets, be they at the airports, restaurants or at any public place, must be kept clean at all times.

To a foreign visitor, his first encounter when he flies in will be the various amenities provided by the airport authorities. For example, if a visitor walks into a dirty toilet at our airport he will not have a good impression of our country.

While our airport toilets have improved in cleanliness, most of the public toilets in the country are in a deplorable state.

There is need for a nationwide campaign to be initiated by the local authorities to instil in everyone the importance of toilet cleanliness.

It is also time for all Malaysians to discard bad habits like littering in public, dumping rubbish into drains and rivers and polluting the environment.

Developed nation status would mean nothing if Malaysians continue to litter indiscriminately. It is high time local authorities took the lead to educate, seek public co-operation and if necessary to penalise the errant ones in the interests of developing a cleanliness culture.

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