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Renew resolve to keep clean

REVIEW and change has been a significant catchphrase used by top leaders of our nation in the endeavour to bring the country to greater heights of development. The leadership's dynamism is demonstrated in the fact that while Malaysia often takes the lead in galvanising other nations into action against outdated and unjust world systems, the people at home are not spared.

Last week, while witnessing an East-West tussle resulting from Malaysia's call for a review of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Malaysians were also mulling over a recent statement calling on them to change towards technology and cleanliness. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been in the forefront in the crusade to keep the nation clean. Last August, he delivered a strong reminder to Malaysians to immediately stop littering if they want to stay as a model to others. Four months ago, he stressed the need for Malaysians to incorporate more hygienic practices in moving with the times.

Calling on the people to discard outdated attitudes, Dr Mahathir hit the nail on the head when he remarked: "There is no meaning to a successful and progressive nation if we do not learn to live as befits such a people ... Giving meaning to development also means ensuring the environment is in good shape."

Indeed, a lot of the squalor amid splendour found in our towns and cities is self-generated, primarily because of the fact that the people at large just cannot be bothered about their surroundings and the nation's environment as a whole. Caring about the environment has nothing to do with wealth for some poor countries are known to be clean, stemming from the fact that their people uphold their dignity and that of their country. It is a simple task. At the end of the day, it is just about everyone playing his role. There must be the will and responsibility.

An analogy can be drawn from this little episode at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang not long ago. Watching the morning crowd milling at the terminal building while waiting for his flight, this Malaysian wondered at first why the two small Caucasian girls, each holding a carton of drink, were pacing up and down. When they finally deposited the cartons into a trash can some way off, the watcher had his curiosity satisfied. This is the kind of exemplary behaviour that we are asking from all Malaysians, he told his friends later. With indiscriminate spitting and rubbish strewn everywhere, including drains and even public flower troughs, we are a long way from there.

This month is significant in the national clean-up campaign. A nationwide gotong-royong is planned before National Day. Called "Spring Cleaning the Nation", the event aims to promote neighbourliness and togetherness. The objective is instilling awareness of the importance of cleanliness. Meanwhile, an elaborate action plan is in place to improve cleanliness in local authorities. Responsibility towards public property is emphasised. There are also encouraging remarks by Alam Flora that its ultimate goal is to make Malaysia the cleanest place on Earth. The company is undertaking integrated solid waste management and its duties in the Federal capital have just been extended to drain cleaning and street sweeping.

All these are steps in the right direction. But, as experience has manifested to us, there will be no clean Malaysia if there is no sustained

effort all the year round to instil awareness and to act. The campaign in schools is vital. The print media is doing an excellent job in exposing both the uncivic-mindedness of Malaysians and the unsatisfactory performance of many local councils. It is our hope that the more effective legislation making it a mandatory punishment for litterbugs to don special vests to perform cleaning up chores in public, proposed a year ago, will come into force soon. As this is a significant month in our nation's history, let us renew our resolve to make cleanliness a Malaysian way of life.

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