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Adopt culture of maintenance

LAST week a newspaper carried a heart warming pictorial report. It was about a nuptial car that carried a newly married couple. It was the same car that paraded the parents of the bridegroom when they were married 31 years ago. That car is still spick and span, ticking along almost as efficiently as when it was bought in 1966. According to the owner, it never went to a mechanic's workshop. The original factory-installed parts are still there below the hood. The secret of its longevity, according to its owner, is maintenance, regular maintenance.

The owner of that durable vehicle is not the only one who knows the value of maintenance. Many others keep vintage cars in pristine running condition through years of meticulous care. As also do proud owners of grandfather clocks, gramophones, radiograms and even refrigerators. Regular maintenance not only keeps these items in working condition but also adds value, rendering them antiques whose market price far exceeds their original cost.

Unfortunately this culture of maintenance is only evident in a few; the greater majority manifest a culture of waste. They buy household electrical appliances only to discard them a few years later when they are lured by new models. They trade in cars every few years, little realising that regular servicing can keep vehicles roadworthy for periods beyond 20 or even 30 years.

The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, took occasion on Tuesday to comment on this attitude of Malaysians. He observed that Malaysians lacked the culture of maintenance resulting in properties, including government buildings, aircraft and ships left in sordid state. He referred to the phenomenon of Malaysians owning big, luxurious yachts. But the sad aspect is that the crews are almost invariably European. The reason is simple. Malaysians do not know how to maintain yachts. It is a sad commentary on our engineering and technical abilities. Our engineers have built a basic aeroplane which has met the demanding specifications of the US. But the real achievement can only be claimed, as Dr Mahathir pointed out, if the local manufacturer could maintain the aircraft over a longer period.

The habit of maintenance is wanting too at less sophisticated levels. The Government builds beautiful office edifices for public departments and ministries, complete with ponds and fountains. Within a year or two these beautifying ornaments become non-functional, dirty and ultimately eyesores. Remedial work costs money, taxpayers' money.

Lack of maintenance not only costs money over time; it also devalues property. Few bother about maintaining their property which in almost all cases is their house. They only paint them when they make the initial purchase. They do not check regularly to ensure the safety of retaining walls and wiring systems and the durability of their roofs and their water tanks. They only summon the contractors when these features and items fail. The repairs can be expensive. Similarly they give little thought to maintain not only drains within their compounds but also those beyond their perimeter fences. Some presume that drains are conduits for all manner of rubbish. The danger is never realised until the clogged drains channel muddy flood waters into their living rooms after rain. Clearly then urgent is the need for all to cultivate the culture of maintenance.

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