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`Repair culture' way to sustainable development

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I WISH to refer to the article "Dr M: We need to adopt culture of maintenance" (NST, Dec 2).

Being a maintenance engineer and having worked in industries like aviation, thermal power plants, etc, I fully agree with our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The culture of maintenance has to be adopted in our lifestyle/psyche. For any machine (or property) to perform its desired function, the role of maintenance cannot be denied.

However, in the case of an aircraft it becomes vital as the safety of human beings cannot be compromised and the cost involved (of the aircraft) is enormous.

Proper maintenance ensures functionality of the machine, reduces undesired breakdowns, and brings down repair costs and losses due to downtime.

I would like to add one more aspect here, that is, `repair culture'. Even with good maintenance, components and parts do wear and tear. Breakdowns do occur. Maintenance helps increase what is termed as "mean time between failures". It cannot guarantee total elimination of breakdowns.

In the event of a breakdown, we must adopt a culture of repair. At present we are following the "replacement culture". While replacement is easier and faster, it is colossal waste of natural resources and money.

Also, it causes disposal problems leading to environmental damage. Just to quote an example. If the compressor of a household window type air-conditioning unit is damaged, it cannot be repaired.

The cost of replacing the compressor is between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of a new air-conditioner.

So people prefer to discard the faulty air-conditioner and buy a new one with five to seven-year compressor guarantee.

Also vendors will recommend to go for a new air-conditioner simply to maintain their sales. Same is the case with other home appliances/gadgets and machines.

The need of hour is to develop repair skills among the people. This may require opening up of more vocational schools with highly subsidised fees.

The trained technicians may be given incentives to set-up their own `repair clinics', thus generating self-employment, too.

Furthermore, supportive industries at small scale may be encouraged to manufacture various parts/components locally.

Of course, the total repair cost has to be brought down to minimum. This will lead to sustainable development.