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Working towards excellence by attending to the smallest details

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WE must take full responsibility for whatever we do and do it well. These were the words of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he launched the three-day Langkawi Air Carnival recently.

Dr Mahathir was calling on Malaysians to create a culture of excellence. Such a culture would generate greater development and ensure a good life for all.

Coming in the wake of an earlier call to Malaysians to develop a culture of maintenance, it shows the Prime Minister's concern that Malaysians are not giving enough attention to these two important areas.

Dr Mahathir specifically referred to aircraft maintenance, saying that Malaysians should learn the importance of excellence and proper maintenance from the fact that the slightest defect in an aircraft could cause death.

"We must take full responsibility for whatever we do and do it well." There is great wisdom in these words. There are three aspects to this: doing something, doing it well and taking full responsibility for it.

All of us strive for a better life. Some consider this to be achieving a sense of peace. Some equate a better life with happiness. Others feel more money will bring them a better life. And yet others avow that the journey towards achievement brings the greatest satisfaction.

Whatever it is, we all have to be up and doing. And to ensure the success of Vision 2020 and a peaceful and developed Malaysia, everyone has a role to play.

Next, we have to do everything well. This is somewhat more difficult.

As industrial company director and president of the Penang Malays Association Datuk Mohd Yusoff Latiff observed: "There is a general decline in standards in many areas. We find that not enough attention to detail has been given in the making of some products, rendering them of inferior quality.

"We find that there is still a lack of quality consciousness in many things that we do. We should go for quality in everything."

"The Prime Minister is right in reminding us to strive for excellence in work performance. We have the facilities and encouragement for this. The young especially are given scholarships and training aid to become better. They must use these well to inculcate the habit of work excellence.

"In fact, I would say our primary aim as a nation as we move towards achieving Vision 2020 is the quest for excellence in all that we do. To put Malaysia on the world map, we need excellence."

Mohd Yusoff is right about the decline in standards. Take road repair and maintenance. Frequently, roads are repaired this week and by next week, the potholes reappear.

One has only to look at some of the roads in the Prai Industrial Estate in Penang and several roads on Penang island to be convinced of this. Contrast this with the situation 15 years ago, roads repaired then stayed in good condition for long periods.

Are those carrying out and supervising repair and maintenance work lackadaisical in their attitude these days? Or are materials and equipment used today of inferior quality due to the attitude of those making them? Or is money given more importance than quality and work performance?

The constant calls by Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh to local authorities to buck up and keep drains clean is

another clear evidence of standards having deteriorated. He has asked them to send regular reports with photographs.

Even the pride of the nation, the Proton cars, sometimes come with defects.

At a time when the Government wants Malaysians to buy Malaysian and use Malaysian, it is imperative that this culture of excellence in work performance take strong root. For this, there is a need to pay attention to details.

The wise men of yore have advised that work should be done as worship. Perhaps this line should be adopted by the Government and people of Malaysia: work is worship.

For most Malaysians, worship is very important. If work is considered a form of worship, then it can only mean that there will be excellence in work performance.

If this feeling can be developed from young, the nation will likely have a population that gives as much importance to quality as it does to worship.

And as Mohd Yusoff pointed out, excellence in work performance is important if we are to achieve Vision 2020.

The third aspect of Dr Mahathir's sentence quoted at the beginning is taking responsibility for whatever we do.

The problem is that often, people pass the buck. Human tendency is to blame others for our faults.

If everyone takes full responsibility for his or her part, there is little doubt that work excellence will develop of itself. If everyone is committed to his or her work and performs it with an attitude of worship, then quality will be the norm.

This attitude needs to be inculcated from young. Perhaps those preparing the school curriculum would like to take note and include elements that encourage such a work culture in examples quoted in school texts and story books.

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