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Great need to cultivate a maintenance culture

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WORKS Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu disclosed recently that the Government had set aside RM100 million for the maintenance and stabilisation of hill slopes to prevent landslides and disasters in view of the current wet spell.

According to the Minister, the Government is giving serious attention to the recent landslides which occurred on the Kuala Kubu Baru-Raub trunk road.

The fact that landslides are a frequent occurrence coupled with building collapse, accidents and man-made disasters clearly points to our failure to develop a maintenance culture and make it a way of life.

As pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on several occasions, although Malaysia has been spared natural disasters like earthquakes, typhoons that cost thousands of lives, Malaysians are still plagued by tragedies "that are of our own doing".

If buildings collapse, rivers become murky, beautiful hills and mountains are scarred, road accidents occur, drug abuse take place and AIDS spreads - these are all due to our own actions.

And if we are responsible for all these negative and destructive occurrences, it is also up to us to prevent them.

Everyone must be responsible and accountable. We need to exercise greater care in whatever we do, while cultivating and developing a maintenance culture to prevent man-made disasters.

Landslides along Federal roads is one of the many examples which have occurred due to inadequate action taken to maintain and stabilise hill slopes.

The blame for landslides should not be confined solely to torrential and incessant rain.

Other factors such as ill-planned development, illegal land clearing, hill slope destabilisation and poor maintenance of flood control structures in nearby areas can also result in landslides.

Playground equipment in housing estates is also another example of poor maintenance.

I have been informed by residents that playground equipment in many housing estates or even in public parks, maintained by local authorities, are not frequently checked to determine their safety.

Not long ago, there was a case of an eight-year-old boy who lost two fingers while playing at a playground in Taman Perling, Johor Baru.

There have been other instances of children sustaining minor injuries while using playground equipment but these were not reported.

Local authorities throughout the country should conduct checks on the condition of playground equipment in housing estates or public recreational areas.

The issue at stake is not only playground equipment but also other public amenities or infrastructures for public use.

For example our roads and highways need to be regularly maintained in the interest of road safety.

I have often visited community halls for certain gatherings or functions. To my dismay, although the buildings looked new, the toilets were badly maintained and left in a very unhygienic state.

Similarly, the drains in many local authority areas are very often clogged. Even some buildings built by the local authorities are in a state

of disrepair.

All these do not reflect well on the local authorities and clearly show that a sustainable maintenance culture is missing.

The answer lies with the local authorities - they should not only be development-oriented but also maintenance-oriented.

Priority should be given to instil a maintenance culture at all levels of the public and private sectors.

At home and in schools, children must be taught that cleanliness of one's habitat and surroundings are the attributes of a cultured person and society.

Let's not wait for others to tell us that we are less than cultured.

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