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Keeping our environment clean must be everyone's business

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THE Malaysian Nature Society welcomes the call from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to be more sensitive towards the environment and its cleanliness (NST, June 5).

We also agree that cleanliness is everyone's job and not just the duty of the municipal authority.

If everyone were to dispose of his or her garbage indiscriminately, we would eventually live in a rubbish dump.

Accumulated rubbish is not only unsightly, it also harbours diseases, encourages pests and tarnishes the tourism industry.

Rubbish and other waste pollute the groundwater with toxic chemicals and kill the animals that live in the area. Countless turtles, for example, have died eating plastic bags which they think were jellyfish. The leatherback turtle, once the proud mascot of the tourism industry, is now on the brink of extinction. The turtle is only one out of several hundred animals affected by solid waste.

There are several measures that could be taken to combat this menace. The local authorities should provide sufficient garbage bins in areas frequented by the public. These bins will also have to be large enough to be vandal-proof.

State Governments should also step up educational programmes. People will only love what they know and conserve what they have been taught.

Enforcement, too, will have to be stepped up in order to punish offenders and errant picnickers. The recent "cleanup day" organised by the society throughout the country in conjunction with Earth Day 2000 saw more than 100 bags of rubbish in one stretch of the Kanching waterfalls itself.

The key role should be played by the public. Residents' and village associations as well as hotels and resorts situated near beaches, rivers, parks, etc, should be actively involved in environmental preservation.

If we do not stop throwing rubbish everywhere, our beautiful country and all its magnificent places and animals will soon be destroyed. Let us begin to say "Malaysia Boleh" when it comes to cleaning our nation.