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Make safety, environment issues our prime concern

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THE New Year did not start off well for Malaysians as far as safety and the environment are concerned, although Y2k had generally proven to be a non-event.

Though we are in the midst of our New Year and Hari Raya celebrations, we certainly cannot be unconcerned about the daily road carnage, the landslides at Cameron Highlands which claimed six lives, soil erosion leading to a cave-in at the highlands and the floods in the Klang Valley, particularly along the Batu Tiga stretch of the Federal Highway.

All these have something to do with safety and the way we manage our environment. The question is, are we making peace with our environment?

History has an important lesson for humanity - a civilisation could be destroyed if it does not make peace with the environment.

It reminds me of the National Day message of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1994 when he called on Malaysians to be more disciplined and responsible to help curb accidents, calamities and prevent man-made disasters.

The Prime Minister said while Malaysia was spared from natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons and massive floods, Malaysians were plagued by tragedies "that are of our own doing".

Judging from the tragedies and environmental problems that have occurred so far, it is obvious that Malaysians have yet to take heed of Dr Mahathir's message. There are many examples where disasters have occurred due to sheer negligence, and lack of care, concern and responsibility.

Take, for example, the road carnage. The first day of Hari Raya saw 25 road fatalities in the nationwide Ops Statik IV, the highest death toll since the operation began on Dec 23.

Despite various measures taken by the authorities and the private sector, road crashes continued to occur and lives continued to be lost.

Clearly, the problem is the attitude of our motorists and motorcyclists which is one of the major contributory factors to road fatalities. Unless they change their attitude and value their lives by obeying traffic rules, more of these road users, particularly the motorcyclists, will continue to perish on our roads.

It is my view that road safety campaigns be introduced in the school curriculum.

Another example is the perennial problem of flash floods.

Are all those responsible for development taking adequate measures to ensure that drainage systems at and around their development projects are constantly reviewed and upgraded to improve structure and capacity under a master plan that co-ordinates present and future developments?

It is high time we develop a culture based on due care, responsibility, discipline and efficiency if we are to make Malaysia free from man-made disasters.

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