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## Of Malaysian astronauts and clean toilets

By Ahmad A. Talib

YOU never get a clean toilet when you need one. If you're on the road, and have to answer the call of nature, you have no choice but to do your thing in somewhat unhealthy surroundings. Do a quick survey among your friends and they all have stories to tell about the sorry and disgusting state of Malaysian public toilets.

Somehow, with all the hype about the country's march towards Vision 2020, and the drive towards a Malaysia that is Cemerlang, Gemilang and Terbilang, we seemed to have lost sight of the need to have clean toilets. We've done well to develop the country to where it is now, and there's promise of more to come.

But we still have to do battle with dirty toilets. With the exception of the North-South highway, no one can claim to have clean toilets. The Taiping Municipal Council operates clean toilets, thanks to its hard-driving and result-oriented chief. But these are far and few between.

I had the unpleasant task of trying to explain to a couple of foreign tourists who asked why we don't have clean toilets. I just couldn't explain ...I was at the famous Temerloh Patin stopover shops for drinks and to answer the call of nature when I met the two tourists. They had their handkerchiefs over their noses and it wasn't difficult to see why.

One has to pay 20sen to use the toilet. The queue was long since it was the weekend. And tempers were short.

An elderly man was telling off a younger lad in jeans and scruffy t-shirt to mind his manners and join the queue. A young mother with a toddler was desperately trying to catch the attendant's attention.

Baldi ada di dalam ("the pail is inside"), the attendant shouted to the young mother. The lady attendant was not having a good day, I thought. It wasn't an orderly sight. Neither was it friendly.

I was walking back to my car when the two tourists asked if there were other public toilets nearby. Since I'm not from Temerloh, I wasn't able to tell them, but they obviously wanted to tell someone their story.

Calling himself David, the younger man said: "I love this country of yours. You people are so friendly. You smile a lot, and your beach is beautiful. Your food may be a little oily but that's not too bad because you have plenty of choices. But man, you must do something about your toilets! They just stink!"

David the tourist is not the only person who has complained about our dirty public toilets. And such complaints are nothing new, either.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad used to complain hard about public toilets. Stories are told of officers making sure toilets in their establishments are clean before Dr Mahathir arrived for visits.

Many a time he would walk into toilets in government buildings just to inspect whether they were cleaned or not. Such attention often result in knee-jerk responses from the relevant authorities. Before long, the toilets would be dirty again.

Travelling long distance to and from the east coast can be a tiring and stressful experience, especially on single-lane roads when one follows a timber-laden lorry. Which explained why some travellers showed clear evidence of frayed nerves when confronted by dirty toilets and rude attendants.

There must be a real and long-term solution to our toilet woes. Perhaps every Menteri Besar and Chief Minister should be made responsible for

these toilets. They should insist that every Wakil Rakyat make it their duty to ensure that public toilets are clean, dry and in working condition.

Their scope should not be confined to public toilets alone but should cover petrol stations, shops and eateries, too.

It just doesn't make sense that when we are talking about sending our own astronauts to space, we seem to have forgotten one of the basic needs of everyday life - clean public toilets.

East coast highway

ROAD users travelling to Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan are waiting anxiously for the opening of the east coast highway. Anyone who is familiar with the route to the east coast will know that they must have the patience and endurance to drive to Kuantan and onwards.

If you are stuck behind a slow-moving lorry, you just have to be patient and wait for the overtaking lane, which may be many kilometres away. But now that a new highway will be opened, at least to Kuantan, travellers are eager to make more trips there. A new highway will be a big boost to business, to say the least.

Pahang State Executive Councillor for Tourism, Datuk Maznah Mazlan should be happy as this will mean more tourists to her state.

I had a brief chat with her a few days ago and she was trying to find new ways to promote tourism in Pahang.

The new highway opens a lot more opportunities to states on the east coast and Maznah should capitalise on this.

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