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Ghani: Set up units to ensure clean public toilets

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JOHOR BARU, Mon. - Local authorities should set up units that specialise in ensuring clean public toilets, said Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Ghani, who made the suggestion when launching the National Clean Toilet Campaign 2003 at a hotel today, said they should also try to enforce by-laws on the upkeep of public toilets.

He said the units could carry out regular spot checks on public toilets, including those in commercial buildings, hotels, restaurants, entertainment outlets and petrol stations.

"As for Johor, the local authorities and Health Department have formed 'flying squads' to check on the conditions of such toilets.

"The squads will not only take action against public toilet operators who fail to keep toilets clean but also make recommendations on how to improve their condition."

He said the urgent need to improve the conditions of public toilets in the country was highlighted at a Cabinet meeting last month when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad showed ministers a pictorial book by a group of Japanese students who recently visited the country.

"Everything in the book praised Malaysia as being a beautiful country while its people were described as being warm and friendly.

"However, when it came to our public toilets, there was nothing good said about them and this was proven by one whole page of pictures in the book. Just imagine the damage to our country's image if this book were to be published worldwide."

As for the campaign, he lauded the initiative by the Housing and Local Government Ministry, which was in line with the resolution at the World Toilet Summit 2001 in Singapore which described cleanliness of toilets as a reflection of the culture and habits of a society.

Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui, who represented Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting at the function, said the campaign would be the largest of its kind organised by the ministry.

Admitting the failure of past campaigns to clean public toilets, Chin said the ministry would work with others such as the Health and Education ministries, non-governmental organisations and the media in this effort.

"This campaign will carry on indefinitely. We are starting today in Johor and will move on to other parts of the country.

"Our priority includes getting the message across to the public so that we can change the attitude of the people by stressing the importance of keeping public toilets clean."