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Living, breathing, thinking modern

THE Prime Minister is exhorting Malaysians to make a lifestyle change, adapting themselves to the country's "first-class facilities". Simply put, what Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants is for the country's development to be reflected in the people's conduct. Food stalls, for example, should be restricted to places where the standard of public hygiene is easily monitored. The proprietors must maintain the highest standards of quality and cleanliness. The patrons should demand the standards as sensible and responsible consumers.

There is also the need to conform to demanding ethical practices, another indicator of the modernised person. Take the banking industry, for instance. The banker and his or her officers must have impeccable integrity. On the part of the borrower, there is clear understanding of the need to meet every requirement head-on and not expect rules to be bent and exceptions made. In these circumstances, both the service provider and user know not to smudge the transparency needed to foster a healthy banking sector.

In politics, democracy defines ethics. Money politics and strong-arm tactics are indicators of political under-development. Politicians who have no qualms about the utility of these methods in advancing their careers are not democrats and do not belong in the democratic process. For it is the country's political development, above all else, which will determine whether the Prime Minister's exhortations will come to pass, since politics determines leadership.

It is, therefore, not enough for Malaysians to know how to queue or to flush toilets. The Petronas Twin Towers, though a symbol of the nation's achievement cannot, on its own or even together with the many other splendid brick-and-mortar edifices, claim to have modernised us. As the Prime Minister observed, far too often these buildings are not maintained. The Light Railway Transit (LRT) system, meant to make travel in and out of the city convenient, is now said to be breeding petty crime, which is fast ruining that pretty picture of modernity. Because modern is as modern does, are we then, modern?