

11/11/2003

Toilets in Soweto are cleaner than those here

Fazar Arif

ON my flight back to Kuala Lumpur from Johannesburg on board Malaysia Airlines, I got hold of the October edition of the Malaysian Business magazine and read a tribute to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The last few paragraphs about Dr Mahathir's unfulfilled dream of cleaner public toilets in our country caught my attention.

My first visit to South Africa was an eye-opener. I found a squatter area in Soweto or the "tin houses," where the "the lowest of the lowest," lived, (according to the tour guide) cleaner than most parts of the cities or towns in our country. Need I mention the public toilets?

One wonders how these people who lived in poverty or below poverty could have a higher standard of hygiene and cleanliness than even the middle and even "upper-class" Malaysians?

The problem with our public toilets stems from attitude.

Recklessness and disregard for others when on the road show the irresponsible behaviour that we Malaysians regard as "normal".

Schoolchildren, and "supposedly" more knowledgeable adults are littering indiscriminately.

Habits and attitudes in public places are a reflection of the habits at home. Most of us have failed to show regard for others and their rights as "persons".

When we have no regard for fellow human beings as "persons", what hope do we have for a civilised and progressive people?

FAZAR ARIF

Kota Kinabalu