

Hello, Malaysia is not one giant rubbish bin

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LEAKING roofs and burst pipes in government buildings have had their fair share of adverse publicity. There has been enough finger-pointing about who is responsible for the poor workmanship resulting in the problems. Efforts are needed to rectify them. Fortunately, this is being done but at a cost to the taxpayer, with additional funds being allocated for the repairs.

While efforts are being made to rectify the problems, it is equally, if not more important, to ensure that such incidents do not recur. These problems cannot be the mark of a country that aspires to join the ranks of a developed nation in 13 years.

The march towards attaining developed-nation status means improvements in all areas and aspects. This includes the quality of work, increased productivity, improved attitude towards work, efficiency, cleanliness, transparency and good corporate governance.

This also means that we continue to maintain and preserve our culture and heritage.

A culture of maintenance needs to be instilled in each and everyone. This includes regular maintenance of all buildings — public and private. A schedule should be drawn up for in-



spection and maintenance and this must be strictly adhered to and not just on paper. It is important to ensure that the buildings and various facilities are in good working condition at all times and not just when a VIP is visiting.

If we can send our cars for regular service to ensure that they remain in working condition, why not have regular service and maintenance for public buildings and amenities as well?

The poor and at times pathetic state of public toilets is almost legendary. On Monday, the mufti of Perlis, Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin, expressed regret that toilets in some of the mosques were dirty.

Smelly and dirty taxis, coupled with some that are filled with cigarette smoke, do not give the visitor a good impression of the country.

There is no point spending millions of ringgit telling the world that Malaysia has some of the best beach-

es in the world when they are littered with rubbish. There is no point advertising that the world's oldest tropical forests are found here when greed and indiscriminate logging encroaches into protected areas causing untold damage to the environment and destroying the green lungs and the "world's oldest rainforest".

Opposition is growing to indiscriminate buildings and approvals given by local authorities for construction of high-rise buildings in violation of existing structural plans. And those opposing new plans are not the unions or pressure groups. They are among the well-connected and respected individuals of Malaysian society.

There is no point promoting the country as one comprising different races religions and cultures, when visitors are greeted by unsmiling Immigration officials and taxi drivers ready to take them for a ride and charge them exorbitant rates.

Taxi drivers and Immigration officers are among the first Malaysians a visitor comes in contact with. First impressions count and have lasting effect. Then again, the actions of the religious officials who knocked on the doors of American couple Randall Barnhart, 62, and his wife Carole, 61, do not lend support to claims that

Malaysia supports racial tolerance and harmony.

Their personal stories and experience at the hands of these officials will have a long and lasting impact on their friends and family, more than any promotion and advertising blitz that Tourism Malaysia or any other agency puts up at tremendous cost.

There is a lot that Malaysia has to offer a visitor. But it is equally important that the beauty of the country and its natural attractions are preserved. This needs to be done not only for the visitors and tourists but also for future generations of Malaysians themselves. But, unfortunately, there is increasing evidence that it is being destroyed.

The piles of rubbish along the roads and highways and under bridges are not only an eyesore but also a health hazard. Rubbish is thrown indiscriminately out of posh cars onto the roads. Plastic bags and empty drink cans are strewn all over the place.

Why is it that we are proud of our homes, keep them clean and tidy and yet are unable to demonstrate the same behaviour in public? The prime minister, too, was prompted to point that out.

"We clean and tidy our house," he

said, "why not extend the same care outside the home?" But there are some Malaysians who take the whole country as their dustbin.

Numerous illegal banners and posters on lamp-posts, trees and pillars offering all manner of services from English tuition, get-rich-quick offers, plumbing and motorcycle inner tubes compete for attention and are an eyesore.

Developed-nation status calls for balanced development. It is important that as Malaysia moves towards its goals as outlined in Vision 2020, the maintenance culture is instilled in everyone and practised and adhered to at all levels.

It is also important that we do not forget our manners and ensure that the country is not littered with "hills of rubbish" along the roads and highways and "decorating" trees, road signs and lamp-posts.

Buildings must be maintained and inspected regularly. The surrounding areas, public areas, beaches and picnic sites, too, must be maintained and kept clean. Maintenance culture and civic consciousness cannot be emphasised enough as the country moves up the ladder of development.

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