

Cleanliness Of Public Toilets A Shared Responsibility

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(This article is written in conjunction with the launch of the National Cleanliness Policy on Nov 3)

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- Less than an hour -- that is all it takes for public toilets to get dirty again after they have been cleaned, according to Zawil Fadzilah Yahya, a former janitor.

"In just 20 minutes (after cleaning), we can see all kinds of dirt in the toilets, not including the wet floors," the 60-year-old housewife lamented.

She said some cleaners would complain that it was far easier to take care of 10 babies than keep public toilets clean.

"The strange thing is most of the users are not children but adults!"

Zawil Fadzilah, who lives in PPR (People's Housing Project) Desa Rejang in Setapak, said she has friends who were still working as cleaners at public toilets in the city.

"I used to be a cleaner myself and I know this job is mentally and physically exhausting. Yes, it's their job (to clean toilets) but how will you feel when the toilet you washed less than half an hour ago gets dirty again?"

"They also have to be very patient with the attitude of the public, most of whom lack civic consciousness," she added.

PENALISED FOR 'DAMAGING' FIXTURES

It is worse when users insist on using a toilet in the midst of a cleaning session.

"Some people are so stubborn... they will enter the toilet even if the workers are still hard at work and there is a sign outside informing the public that cleaning is in progress.

"They walk in with their dirty shoes and the cleaners have to clean up after them. The cleaners get scolded by their supervisors if the toilets are dirty but the truth is they are working hard from 7 am to 7 pm daily," Zawil Fadzilah told Bernama.

They also have to carry with them cleaning chemicals and paraphernalia, as well as the floor drying fan which can weigh about 10kg or more.

And, should there be a case of a broken sink or toilet bowl, the janitor who had cleaned the toilet concerned will be held responsible. Apparently, their salaries will be deducted by their employers to replace the broken items.

"They have to pay for the actions of some irresponsible people who either accidentally or deliberately destroy public property," said Zawil Fadzilah.

The public, in general, habitually gripes about the filthy conditions of public restrooms in this country and never fails to put the blame on the janitors but don't all Malaysians share the responsibility of keeping their public toilets spick and span?

NATIONAL CLEANLINESS POLICY

Even Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself has said that he is embarrassed by the dirty and smelly state of public toilets in the country which, he added, reflects the poor civic responsibility of the public.

Speaking at the official launch of civics education for schools in August, he said the problem is not due to the absence of stringent regulations but individuals who lack discipline.

Dirty and foul-smelling public toilets will hopefully be a thing of the past once the National Cleanliness Policy (2020-2030) is implemented.

The policy, formulated by the Housing and Local Government Ministry, will be launched at PPR Tehel in Melaka on Sunday. Dr Mahathir is expected to officiate the launch.

The policy, the first of its kind in Malaysia, is an initiative by the government to turn Malaysia into a clean, sustainable and prosperous nation through the adoption of hygienic practices and involvement of families, communities and society in environmental conservation efforts.

In announcing the drafting of the National Cleanliness Policy in February, Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin had said that its major thrusts would be raising awareness on the role of the community in national cleanliness, getting the agencies concerned to study the latest technologies and programmes to raise public awareness on cleanliness, and promoting the recycling of waste and turning it into a source of income.

Interestingly, the policy is also aimed at improving the image of sanitation workers by giving them access to training courses so that they can enhance their skills and obtain certification.

EDUCATE CHILDREN

Commenting on the National Cleanliness Policy, Malaysian Nature Society president Prof Dr

Ahmad Ismail said it was timely and would help Malaysians to cultivate hygienic practices.

He said the adoption of hygienic practices may seem trivial to some people but it is something that has to be given due emphasis and has to start at a young age.

He said the academic-oriented national education system is one of the reasons why parents do not give much focus on educating their children on hygienic practices.

"This is why many children are not inclined to practising good habits when they grow up. The issue of (dirty) toilets, littering are all old issues.

"The school system and parents must continuously impart an understanding of the proper ways of using a toilet, including respecting the facility as the collective right of the public," Ahmad told Bernama.

He said educating children on proper toilet use should begin at home and practised in schools.

"In the home and school, there must be supervision by either the parents or teachers. When children learn to use the toilet in a disciplined manner at home or school, it will become a habit and they will show the same discipline when they use public toilets," he said.

Pointing to Japan as an excellent example of a nation that has succeeded in instilling good habits in the people from a young age, he said the time has come for everyone to play an important role in all matters related to cleanliness.

"It's not just related to toilet cleanliness but also other issues such as the proper disposal of garbage," he added.

Translated by Rema Nambiar

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