

Toilet condition defines society's culture

QUALITY OF LIFE: Can Malaysia ever have clean toilets when its people have bad habits and wrong attitudes?

WHEN the Quality Restroom Association Malaysia (GRAM) was approved by the Registrar of Societies in 2005, then Housing and Local Government Deputy Minister Datuk Robert Lau Hoi Chew declared: "We must uplift the status of our public toilets to the level of our bedroom, dining room, kitchen and lounge so that they receive the same type of respect and care".

Credit must be given to some high-end shopping complexes and highway recreational sites for providing clean toilets voluntarily.

The government launched the clean toilet campaign in 1997. Guidelines to grade toilets were drafted by Sirim and the Housing and Local Government Ministry then. Minister after minister had attended the World Toilet Summit and those responsible for cleanliness should take turns to attend and broaden their understanding.

Decades ago, education ministers and other ministers launched the clean toilet campaign in schools. Some had visited public toilets and

shopping complexes in 1997, and found them to be dirty, unclean and unsafe. Shophouses meant for 10 people or so were used as restaurants for more than 100, with no upgrading of toilets. What is clear is that there is no coordination between ministries regarding the standard of toilets.

Citing the Public Cleaning Act, Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan recently said public toilets were "still dirty, nauseating and unsafe", and declared that the ministry would take over the maintenance of 2,600 public toilets, in more than 145 local councils, beginning 2016.

This decision is a clear indictment on state, district and local council leadership, which do not have the capacity, concern, political or leadership will to ensure the continuous level of cleanliness in their constituency and areas of responsibility.

Vision 2020 and the quality of life can only be achieved at the local and district levels. If leaders at those levels do not care, have given up or are in helpless mode, how can the community and nation develop?

South Korea has embarked on a crusade, a "revolution" for clean toilets. The Korean Clean Toilet Association (KCTA) sees clean toilets as part of the society's high culture with, for instance, the Yemwon Toilet in Suwon, as a model.

Their toilets are given "beautiful

names, carefully decorated and have piped-in music to reflect high status in society".

Toilet maintenance is about having appropriate infrastructure, which is about the technical aspects of culturally-acceptable toilets.

It is about systematic maintenance, which is about management efficiency with a culture of quality. It is about the users, which is about personal and community culture, cultural attitudes and social norms.

Maintenance culture is about aesthetics, keeping toilets clean and beautiful, reflecting the high culture of the community.

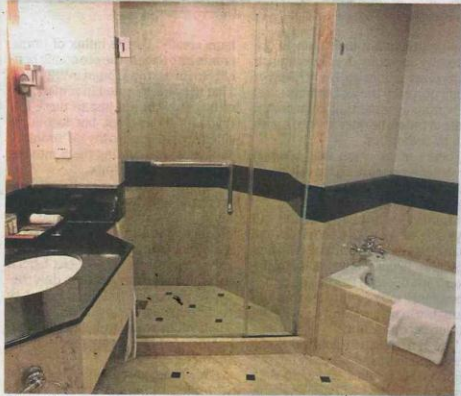
We must have local champions to transform into a clean society. To start with, all religious places should ensure utmost cleanliness of their domains. A toilet user from a high culture will leave the toilet as clean or cleaner than before he uses it; at home, respecting other family members; in public places, respecting other community members.

When this philosophy is transferred to the workplace, an employee will leave his workplace better because he is present and a contributor. How can we be like South Korea or Japan in terms of quality of life, if we do not show concern for cleanliness of toilets?

Practically, all 30 million Malaysians have gone to school. If, as users of public toilets, many have bad habits, then the schools have



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failed to teach good toilet-training during the last 60 years.

In fact, Lau had said that poor toilet conditions in most schools were also to be blamed if the schools were to become the "incubator for bad toilet habits".

Those who campaigned to be elected must have on their agenda clean toilets in their constituencies, in restaurants and, recreational and other public areas. Their agenda should be to ensure that every household has safe drinking water and clean toilets to achieve universal access to the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (Wash) system.

These elected leaders, as well as government leaders, can frame their legacy agenda within the Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) initiatives, helping more than 2.5 billion people who do not have access to proper sanitation.

Certainly, we do not want Malaysia to be in the lower ranks of nations of the world when we declare "developed nation" status.

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