

## LEARNING CURVE

As we celebrated National Day, people in Lebanon were trying to sort out piles of rubbish in the capital city, Beirut.

It is ironic that stench from the pile-up of rubbish can get people to unite and launch a protest dubbed "You Stink" against the authorities concerned to show anger on the failure to keep the city clean.

They peacefully occupied the offices of the Minister of Environment in Beirut while reportedly demanding action as they chanted "Leave! Leave! Leave!", directed at the minister who was adamant to stay in the cabinet.

He allegedly resigned from a committee created to manage the disposal issue.

Since the demands were issued, the movement has grown larger as thousands gathered peacefully in a rare show of unity from a community more noted for its splintering along politico-religious lines. Lebanon — known for its political division between Hezbollah (the militant Shiite group) and its rivals — seemed to be "united" by mountains of uncollected rubbish since July, following political disputes leading to disruption of services. Other civil organisations, including labour and environment, have lent support to the loosely knit group movement.

A committee of citizens from different sectors of society is said to have rallied the protesters together against what is termed as "corruption that paralyses government services and the economy".

It claimed payment for handling rubbish disposal collection was postponed twice.

Fortunately, what happened at the home front pertaining to a similar issue was starkly different.

At about the same time, Malaysian

# EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

households — in the states and territories which have adopted the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007 (Act 672) — were notified that it is mandatory to separate waste from the beginning of this month.

It will be implemented in stages involving Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Pahang, Johor, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Perlis and Kedah.

The issue is not only about rubbish disposal per se but also how to do it properly, adding a whole new learning experience to sustain a cleaner environment. This is done by discarding recyclable and non-recyclable waste separately at the point of origin before they are collected by the solid waste management authority.

All these happenings bring up the question: how effective is the implementation? After all, the campaign to create awareness of recycling has been launched twice, in 1996 and then in 2000.

Yet, according to some sources, only about 10 per cent of Malaysians are said to

practise it consistently.

This may indicate an uphill battle if education for sustainability is not undertaken aggressively to change the prevalent mindset.

More recently, a study purportedly carried out by the Solid Waste And Public Cleansing Management Corporation (SWCorp), formerly known as Perbadanan Pengurusan Sisa Pepejal dan Pembersihan Awam, painted a different picture.

SWCorp chief executive officer Datuk Ab Rahim Md Noor said: "The study conducted in 2009 revealed that 89 per cent of the 55,000 respondents stated that they were aware of 3R practices. Unfortunately, they have not made it a culture."

The new programme covers collection of waste isolation involving the disposal of food waste for the first two days every week, and the third day collection is for recyclables.

It is time for Malaysians to join the world in being committed to a more sustainable environment which also means that education for sustainability must

move up accordingly, beyond the 3R regime of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle as conventionally practised.

There must be another "R" preceding 3R — and that is to "Refuse" to get into the habit of not creating, less still accumulating, rubbish in the first place.

This implies forward thinking on dealing with unwanted potential waste, well before involving any transaction.

For example, when buying consumer goods, we may choose to leave the packaging, especially environmental unfriendly material such as plastics, at the point of sale.

Therefore, the issue of 3R does not arise. It is better still if one learns to "Refuse" any form of purchase deemed unnecessary.

In more advanced and aware societies such as Japan, the separations are even more refined, involving more than two types. Some can be up to 10 types.

But long-lasting habits can only be forged from a young age and this is where we should begin in the first place, in a consistent way.



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