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**Letter to Editor -by : Wan Mohaned Salih, Taiping**

THE letters by Mohd Ismail and Gervin (NST, Sept 19) concerning the environmental nuisance of plastic bags are indeed interesting.

Here is a simple solution to be more responsible towards our environment. Go Russian.
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My wife, four friends and I have just returned from a 14-day trip to Russia, visiting the three largest cities - Moscow, St Petersburg and Nizhniy Nogorod. Contrary to what we see in Hollywood movies, Russians seem friendly, helpful and civic-minded.

We were struck by the beauty and cleanliness of the three cities, especially St Petersburg. There were no bits of papers, plastic bags and cigarette butts in the streets or floating on the rivers or canals.

The water looks so clean. I probably could drink it, said a Malaysian student I met.

How is this possible?

The answer lies in the countless number of trash bins conveniently placed along waterways, in front of premises and in parks within 30 metres of each other.

None of these is overflowing, which proves that garbage is collected and disposed of on a regular basis.

How it is disposed of, I never asked. Perhaps it is recycled because a city like Moscow with a population of 12 million must have some kind of organised scientific method of garbage disposal.

An incident that startled me was when I went to a grocery store near a students' hostel in Nizhniy.

After paying, I asked for a plastic bag to keep six cups of yoghurt, some bananas and a loaf of Russian black bread.

I changed my mind when the lady cashier asked me to pay an extra 10 rubles (about RM1.36) for it.

I then carried all the stuff in my baggy jacket.

Later, I realised that this was a way to discourage people from using plastic bags, thus enhancing environmental cleanliness. Now, that's a thought.

Do you know that it is an offence to wash cars, even at home, in Russia?

A friend of mine, an engineer attached to the Sukhoi project in Moscow, informed me that washing cars could only be done at car-wash outlets.

It is not about water conservation, but rather about messing the surroundings with little pools of water and car shampoo lather.

That explained why vehicles in Russia looked like they have not had a bath for ages.

What we need here is for our local authorities to systematically place more trash bins along city and town streets and in recreational areas.

Having one every 400 square metres isn't sufficient. Disposing of its contents once every three or four days doesn't help either.

You only have to go to schools to realise why they are always spick and span.

Every classroom has a waste paper basket. Trash bins are neatly placed along corridors, in canteens and beside playing fields.

Our schoolchildren, who have been groomed to appreciate and recognise the importance of cleanliness in school, tend to litter the streets with all sorts of items outside school hours simply because of the inadequate number of trash containers in public places.

We must realise that government efforts alone are not enough to beautify the environment. More is expected from private agencies and, most importantly, the public.

During 50 years of independence, Malaysians, through sheer grit, determination and perseverance, have become scientists, doctors, world champions in certain sports, conquered Everest and the polar regions and built state-of-the art mega structures.

But why is it so hard for Malaysians to do one of the easiest of things - putting rubbish into bins? Throwing rubbish into trash bins should come as naturally as visiting the toilet when nature calls.