

Timely gift and reminder for Budget 2017

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repairs is myopic.

One extreme example of the preference for bricks-and-mortar instead of people is the dire shortage of safety inspectors in the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

Director-General Mohtar Musri says DOSH has only 12 safety inspectors to check construction sites while the remaining 48 technical employees are required to monitor factories and other workplaces. That DOSH's technical employees number only 60 is grossly inadequate – the Klang Valley alone has 600 construction sites while some construction sites are so massive that multiple visits by DOSH are required.

Underscoring the need for an immediate increase in the number of safety inspectors is one disturbing fact – there were 140 deaths in the construction industry nationwide last year, a massive 57% jump from the previous year.

Another example of ill-considered parsimony in federal government expenditure is the poor condition of schools in Sarawak, an issue highlighted recently by an angry Tan Sri Adenan Satem.

"I am sick and tired of appealing for better

schools in Sarawak. I am sick and tired of hearing news about schools without water or electricity supply," Sarawak's chief minister complained publicly and vociferously.

According to a *New Straits Times* article, a report showed 388 schools in Sarawak were deemed to be in a bad condition, 327 needed minor repairs while the damage in another 464 schools was classified as in the medium range.

Failing to boost allocations for annual maintenance and repairs is voodoo

economics. Admittedly, deferring yearly maintenance and postponing needed but minor repairs could result in short-term savings.

In the future, however, the repairs will be major, could take far longer and will be more costly.

Furthermore, endangering the safety of teachers and students – whether in Sarawak or

elsewhere – could be a major voter loser for Putrajaya.

A third example of misplaced preferences is the recent disruption in water supply that affected 350,000 consumers in Selangor,

including the Serdang and Kajang government hospitals.

Patients in the wards in these two hospitals couldn't bathe or clean themselves although critical areas like the operating theatres and the diet preparation department weren't affected.

While water supply has been restored, this incident prompts several questions.

Why are consumers living in a state with the third highest GDP per capita in Malaysia suffering from cuts in water supply that lasted for several days?

To prevent a disruption in supply, shouldn't hospitals store sufficient water in storage tanks to ensure all users, including staff and patients, enjoy uninterrupted access to water?

Having allowed the Hi-Tech Industrial Park – a potential source of contamination – to be sited just 37km upstream from the Semenyih water intake plant, why haven't the authorities mandated the filtration technology used to be upgraded?

Water quality specialist Dr Zaki Zainudin suggested using membrane technology that removes all contaminants at any level, similar to that in Singapore.

In short, Putrajaya's expenditure in Budget 2017 should be appropriate in quantum, timely and people-first.

Opinions expressed in this article are the personal views of the writer and should not be attributed to any organisation she is connected with. She can be contacted at siokchoo@thesundaily.com

Putrajaya should curb lavish expenditure on bricks-and-mortar and re-orientate its focus on people. While billion-ringgit infrastructure spending can benefit taxpayers, the impact is likely to be felt several years later."