

23/02/1997

Adults also to blame for social ills

A. Kadir Jasin

NOW that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has spoken openly about social ills affecting the country, especially the young, every other Tan, Doraisamy and Hassan (the Malaysian equivalent of Tom, Dick and Harry) thinks that he must jump on the bandwagon.

I do not think Dr Mahathir minds, though. Although Tan, Doraisamy and Hassan may not be totally clear about the problem and how to go about solving it, the fact that the Prime Minister's plea has provoked their concern is a positive sign.

We need Tan, Doraisamy and Hassan as much as we need the sociologists, psychologists, social activists and political parties to battle the worsening problems of dadah addiction, domestic violence, child abuse, teenage sexual promiscuity, runaways, loitering and many more related problems.

But in order to give the issue its proper perspective, it must be noted that adults are equally responsible for causing these problems and even participating in them.

If Tan, Doraisamy and Hassan were responsible husbands and fathers, many of these problems would not have arisen in the first place. It seems that men are better at making babies (pardon the expression) than parenting them.

Long before this issue took centre stage, a brainstorming session organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry in Langkawi had identified these and other problems among the youths.

Chaired by the Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, and attended by religious and community leaders, educationists, sociologists and senior civil servants, the meeting identified the lack of parenting skills as one of the core reasons for teenagers and young people engaging in these self-destructive activities.

I was fortunate to be invited to take part in the session and I agreed whole-heartedly when a woman participant bluntly said modern Malaysian couples thought they could be good parents simply because they were educated and well-to-do.

It was at that meeting that a proposal was made for school-leavers to be put through a kind of national service, not necessarily of the military kind, to inculcate discipline and a sense of social responsibility in them as well as to guide them in educational and career choices.

As for failures at parenting, it has to be noted that they are as high among educated and well-to-do parents as they are among poor, uneducated parents in the villages and the cramped City Hall flats and squatter colonies.

Spending too much time but incorrectly with children is as bad as not spending enough time with them. Parents who laze around the house, smoking cigarettes, watching endless hours of banal TV dramas, reading trashy tabloids, shouting at each other and nagging at the children cannot be a positive influence on their offspring.

Similarly, parents who are too caught up with work, the high life and outdoor activities cannot be positive examples either.

Just think, how many times a week or how many minutes a day do we talk to our teenage sons and daughters, asking them about their day at school, about how they are getting along with their homework, projects and friends, about how they use their pocket money, about their surfing of the

Internet and about the length of their hair?

Or how many times do we gather enough courage to talk to them about sex and tell them not to smoke, drink or take drugs?

And have we warned them to be careful when they visit the shopping complexes to watch movies or browse for the latest computer programs so that they are not enticed into unhealthy activities or caught behaving somewhat unacceptably by shutter-happy photographers of some tabloid newspapers or TV cameramen?