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Business sector on ways it can tackle social ills

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The alarming rise in social problems among youths has prompted the business community to come up with several proposals on how they can supplement and complement Government's efforts to combat them.

Commerce and industry associations said they were aware that the problem, if left unchecked, would eventually affect them adversely and deprive them of the much needed manpower and market for their products and services.

They were reacting to New Straits Times Sdn Bhd group editor Datuk A. Kadir Jasin's comment that businessmen and corporate executives should take steps to assist the Government in overcoming the problems.

Writing in Business Times' "Kunta Kinte" column on Monday, Kadir said the problems raised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, namely dadah addiction, domestic violence, child abuse, pre-marital sex, lepak and bohsia required a new kind of understanding and commitment by Malaysian businessmen and corporate executives.

He said businessmen and their associations did not have to wait for the Government to ask for their assistance and co-operation.

Instead, they should suggest to the Government what they could and would do to assist in fighting the malaise.

Dr Mahathir touched on these problems in great length in his meeting with Muslim leaders at the Islamic Centre recently, and again last Saturday in his Hari Raya message.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Paul Low said the FMM hoped to implement the Ministry of Youth and Sports' Rakan Muda programme in manufacturing companies by May.

"Rakan Muda, particularly Rakan Sukan, has programmes which can teach youths how to make the best of their leisure time.

"The programme has not penetrated companies yet but we hope to change this soon.

"We have already brought the matter up with the ministry and are studying how we can implement it in the companies."

Low said companies might now have their respective sports clubs but the focus of these clubs and that of the Rakan Muda programme was different.

"Sports clubs emphasise on cultivating team spirit whereas Rakan Muda is more educational."

Low said FMM was also planning to include instructional training as part of the training programme in companies.

"We want to teach employees good values and discipline. The current training programme in most companies do not include such topics, and they are mostly work-related."

On dadah addiction, Low said employees who were found to be addicts would be sent to rehabilitation centres.

"We adopt a caring attitude. Punitive action will not be taken against these employees.

"They will only be dismissed if they took up the habit again after undergoing rehabilitation or if they influenced other workers to take dadah."

Malaysian Employers' Federation executive director M. Zain Majid said it was difficult for the business community to come up with concrete suggestions as the problem was far-reaching and encompassed a wide scope.

"It is hard to suggest a specific role for the private sector in this matter.

"There is no easy formula or solution to the social ills pervading our society," he said, adding that the only way was for employers to advise their staff.

"This is currently not widely practiced.

"It should be made part of the corporate culture as it is a viable means for the business community to help combat the nation's social ills.

"Employers should advise staff who constantly work late or loiter in pubs or other entertainment spots after work and tell them to go home to their families instead.

"They should be made aware how important the family institution is. It is the parent's prime responsibility to discipline their children and be in touch with their way of thinking and aspirations.

"Very often, children get to see their parents only at night, after work.

"Therefore, parents must use whatever time they have after work to communicate with their children."

He said companies should also ensure that their staff attend the company's Family Day and other activities organised to cultivate camaraderie among family members.

Malaysian Associated Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Senator Datuk V.K.K. Teagarajan said the role of the business community in combating social ills could be further enhanced.

"A council should be formed to gather the private sector's opinions on the educational programmes that should be organised for youths."

Teagarajan said it was most important for parents to spend more time with their children.

"A certain amount of moral decay is setting in. Parents have to realise how vital their role is in arresting the problem."

Selangor Chinese Textile General Goods Merchant Association chairman Bong Hon Liong said education was the best way to combat the rising social diseases.

"One way the business community can help is by providing scholarships to the children of our members facing financial difficulties.

"This is currently practised by many associations and guilds.

"With education, children will be taught the proper values," he said.

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