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Finding the right remedy

WHEN something goes wrong, it is perhaps a weakness of human nature to immediately find a scapegoat. In the past few years as the statistics of social ills in Malaysia built up, there was no lack of suggestions as to the causes and remedies. It is a convenient cliché, of course, to blame rapid economic development, innovations of this information technology age and entertainment outlets and games arcades as the causes of the problems plaguing our society, especially the young.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has clearly debunked this fallacy in his statement on Wednesday after meeting with representatives of Federal and State religious agencies to discuss the nation's social problems. His message: Stop finding scapegoats, accept the existence of the problem, understand it and the causes and look for remedial measures. Indeed, it is high time we got down to tackling the problem rather than waste time debating it. The crux of the matter is the strengthening of the spiritual immune system. In this information technology era with its borderless world, we must not deceive ourselves that we can keep out the information deluge. We do not want to be a modern Canute, imagining that we can control the waves, to be precise, cyberwaves. The only effective defence is to strengthen the individual's moral fibre and develop his wisdom and ability to discern between right and wrong, accepting the good and rejecting the bad. It is so true that correcting ourselves is easier than reforming others.

To say that the nation's rapid economic development has caused the present malaise is to subscribe to the outdated conventional view that frowns upon prosperity as mammon and regards it as evil. This kind of thinking will condemn believers to perpetual poverty. It has been proved possible to be economically wealthy and spiritually high at the same time. To achieve balanced development, that is to strike a balance between material and spiritual progress, is in fact a pillar of our Vision 2020 with its goal of developed nation status. Only lopsided rapid material development will bring about social ills and moral decadence.

In strengthening society's moral fibre, the important role of parents and teachers cannot be over-emphasised. Religious and moral values are paramount in building this bastion. The content, and just as important, the way such lessons are taught in schools must be re-examined to see that they are effective in convincing the new generation and that they can build the moral strength. These lessons should be directly related to daily life and acceptable to the analytical minds encouraged by our education system. Teachers will need refresher courses to let them know what is actually required. Our increasingly sophisticated information network can be used to disseminate awareness to parents. The message can be presented through forums and and plays.

On the physical side, Dr Mahathir made it clear that where external influences such as entertainment outlets and nightspots can be controlled, the authorities will see to it that the new regulations are not flouted. This is to ensure that unhealthy activities will not become a norm. It is hoped that the Government's move to make a study and find out the causes so as to better understand the problem, will be followed by concerted action soonest possible. Preconceived notions must be set aside to ensure we find the right remedy.

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