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Getting at root of social woes (HL)

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KAMPUNG GAJAH, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has directed the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers to keep a close check on entertainment and gaming outlets such as video arcades, karaoke centres, discotheques and nightclubs.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub said the order was given after Dr Mahathir, who is Home Minister and Umno president, was briefed on the country's social situation at the Umno supreme council meeting on Jan 11.

Megat Junid said Dr Mahathir viewed the matter seriously as these outlets had been identified as the root of all social problems.

He said some of these places were the start of problems related to promiscuity among youths and the Government did not want such behaviour to spread.

"The Government wants State governments and the local authorities to make a concerted effort to ensure these outlets do not overplay their roles as entertainment outlets," he said.

Speaking to reporters after breaking fast at the Pulau Tiga Kiri mosque last night, Megat Junid said State governments could make amendments to their legislation not to allow certain activities in these places.

He said local authorities which issued premise licences could also make regular checks on the night spots to ensure they abided by the regulations.

He also said stringent measures must be taken by the local authorities to ensure these outlets did not indulge in negative activities such as drug taking and allowing the underaged to enter.

It is believed that some of the entertainment outlets which have electronic video jackpot machines offer prizes and cash rewards to woo customers.

When a person plays a game on the jackpot machine, he accumulates points and exchanges the points for money.

Megat Junid said many people were under the impression that they could bring their families to karaoke centres for some harmless night entertainment but more often than not, these places offered guest relations officers to entertain them.

He said sometimes the GROs were used as bait for immoral activities and sometimes these GROs are foreigners on a visit pass in the country.

Megat Junid said many wives of soldiers and policemen had made reports about their husbands wasting money at such places and often neglecting their household responsibilities.

"These are the activities that bring about moral degradation.

"The State governments must take action to prevent such things from happening," he said.

Policy changes have, over the past fortnight, affected entertainment places in Kuala Lumpur with City Hall first announcing a regulation requiring them to close by 1am.

The rules were then extended further when City Hall decided late last week that karaokes, bars, nightclubs, discos and dangdut clubs would no longer be allowed to operate in old bungalows or houses.

Existing licences will not be renewed except for restaurants "without entertainment elements" in areas like Jalan Pinang, Lorong Perak and Jalan Kia Peng. The same goes for nightclubs located on a shophouse's second

floor and above.

As for residential areas, no new licences will be given. Existing outlets may continue but cannot apply for additional licences, for instance, to add karaoke facilities to a pub.

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