

19/03/1997

Help teenagers, not isolate them

Wan Imran Wan Chik

FIRSTLY, I would like to thank Dr Chandra Muzaffar for acknowledging my "plea". The poem was originally entitled "Dear Dr Mahathir" to inform our Prime Minister of what's going on in our schools these days and the trouble with our education system.

More and more teenagers are dropping out of school after PMR to find work either in shopping complexes, as assistant mechanics or in factories.

Attention is mostly paid to schools within the Kuala Lumpur area whereas most of the social problems are happening outside the cities due to the lack of knowledge and education.

Most of the time, the school environment itself is depressing and stressful. Added to this is the pressure from the teachers themselves as most of the time we are taught and treated like children. They just would not acknowledge us as "growing-up adults".

Teenhood is a time filled with stress as we learn to cope with the changes going on around us and learn how to take on new "responsibilities".

As we grow, our families depend on us to succeed in life, both as students and as human beings. But the outside world seems so interesting and challenging and we are curious and would like to try out everything which comes our way.

As we grow too, we learn to be more dependent and we want to be more of the person we really are. Not the good son or daughter or student but more of an individual who will take his or her place in society and be a more responsible person.

As we come out of school, we would also like to have a good job and earn a sufficient income so that we are able to fend for ourself. But right now, we only wish to enjoy whatever we have left of our teenage lives rather than being burdened with too much on our minds (such as worrying about school subjects).

Just as the children in our primary schools suffer by carrying heavy bags because they are afraid of being scolded for not bringing their books, we suffer too.

Each year, new subjects from the secondary level are being introduced at primary level, exposing our younger ones to mental and physical pressure at such an early age.

These children are being robbed of their childhood and as soon as they reach teenhood, they will rebel and they will get fed up of teachers yelling at them and punishing them as if they were still little children.

With the pressure they are facing, they will look for something to do for release. For those who are easily influenced, there is smoking - which is an addiction so easily attained but very hard to quit.

There are some less hazardous activities like lepak and window shopping (activities we could easily do to ease the pressure on our minds as we could just take a nice stroll looking at all the nice things we could buy or wish to buy but don't have enough money) but now even that is not allowed.

There is skateboarding or roller-blading but the problem is there are no skateboard ramps or proper sidewalks for us to do so.

There is also dancing and listening to music but most of us are not allowed into karaoke lounges or discos. You have to be 18 to enter these places which is kind of stupid as some of us cannot afford to buy our own

Play Station.

Then again, there is dating but everybody keeps on saying we're too young and we should concentrate on school first. It's not like we're going to get married or anything.

And there're also the parents who are always so close-minded about these matters. It's okay to be protective but they should not be too protective to the extent that their children are not allowed to make their own decisions.

There are sports but there's always a problem in finding somebody to play with (they also won't let you use the facilities because you're underaged).

As for school activities like Scouting and others, most of the time our schools are not active in these kinds of activities.

We also have Rakan Muda and Pro-Star but most of the time people don't even know where to get the entry forms. Most of the participants aren't exactly muda as they are also 20 or 25 years and above.

So the question now is: What CAN we DO? Most of the time, teenagers have no place and nothing to do to keep them busy or relieve their tensions. In the end, we start breaking the rules. We are always under pressure from society, and the Government is unwilling to "hear" or "help" us. In fact, it intends to introduce single-session schools without listening to the views of students and teachers, some of whom are also working mothers and have their own children to pay attention to.

If single session is enforced, the teachers would have more school work, more students to look after, and more strict rules to enforce. The Government too would have to use more money to build more school buildings to place the evening session students as well as provide facilities such as game courts and bigger school cafeterias.

And we would need shower rooms for we cannot expect the students to wear their smelly uniform for the whole day unless the Government is willing to provide free clothes.

Then there is the matter of providing enough manpower to teach and look after all these students.

Instead of wasting so much money on something so stressful, why not provide us teenagers with something to do? Support us in what we believe. Give us a goal, something to be proud of.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad once told us about his Vision 2020 and he had said it was our responsibility to build the way to that future. But as we rush towards a goal, we tend to leave others behind, those in need of guidance. Without someone to lend a helping hand, our race towards economic growth will only lead to the downfall of society itself. For the path we make is the path we will remember or regret for the rest of our lives.

Teenagers are individuals with the right to choose who they want to be and the right path they wish to take in life.

I hope that one day there will be a World Youth Organisation which will be just as active as the WWF.

One of my greatest dreams is to be the first teenager to speak at the United Nations on behalf of youths around the world.

Please write to me and tell me what you believe in and give me your opinion.

* The writer is a member of Writers Bloc II.

(END)