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No shortcuts to stemming social ills

SOCIAL ills should be approached like any other illness, and the aim must be the same, that is to find a cure. But science and medicine are of little help and relevance as far as social ills are concerned. The medication to treat social ills must come from within the society, must entail the willingness of every member of that society to take part in efforts to check the rot, and must be prescribed and subscribed by leaders of that society. The doctors of the society, including government leaders, must think constantly of new cures and antibodies, in the form of programmes and strategies to overcome the negative phenomenon.

Prevention is better than cure, of course, but in a society where negative cultures and habits have defeated positive values, an immediate cure is necessary to avoid social mayhem and disaster. In the longer term, after the cure has been found and proved to be effective, perhaps preventive measures can then be considered. The concern over the level of social ills among Muslims in Malaysia, which was expressed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week, was very timely. Social ills may not lead to the death of a society, but they would certainly weaken the structures and pillars that keep a society stable and erect.

The concern about social ills in the Malaysian society is far from rhetorical; it is real. It is disconcerting that a high percentage of the cases of social ills involve the Muslim community in this country. The implication of this is undoubtedly great, especially since Malaysia is looked upon by many other Islamic countries as a model of the ideal Muslim nation - one that is rapidly developing and at the same time upholding the various Islamic principles. It is here in this country that Islamic banking and other financial services, including the takaful, have been introduced together with the Islamic hospital, the Islamic index, and the International Islamic University.

National pride and stakes aside, Malaysians must find a way to cure themselves of social ills and make themselves immune from future bouts. The solution will hold the key to their own well-being and the welfare of their children and grandchildren. In this age of the Internet explosion, where borders that separate countries and their laws are becoming fuzzy, the will of every Malaysian to reject the inflow of negative elements in cyberspace is being severely tested. In the physical world, the nation is forced to continue with the long-running battle with dadah, which is taking the form of ecstasy pills now. The so-called punk culture has somehow re-emerged in shopping complexes and discotheques in the city, with the authorities fighting gallantly to close these nightspots early even as more nightspots are opened to cater to the demand and better spending power.

It is comforting, therefore, that the politicians have begun talking in earnest about finding solutions. Politicians are important in developing a society as they could lead by good examples or lead astray with negative ones. In a way, they are not unlike the media, which could achieve a positive or a negative impact just with the power of the words and pictures. MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, and Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin were among those who have given their own ideas on how to overcome the social ills phenomenon plaguing the Malaysian society.

There will be no shortcuts. The national service idea, when implemented,

will take years to be accepted as a culture. So the earlier the Government gets started, the better. A review of school curriculums will also take time and energy, and so will programmes for school leavers, encouraging parents to be more involved with their children, etc. What will take less time is to punish offenders, label some pills popular with teenagers as a dangerous drug, and follow through the rules on nightspots, smoking and games arcades. Some laws that would help to reduce the cases of social ills in this country are already in place, only waiting to be enforced.

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