

28/02/1997

Reassess recruitment of teachers for the sake of our children

M.L. Cheang

IT has been almost 15 years since I first wrote to a national newspaper to express my opinion on a matter of public interest.

However, after reading "Outlook" by Datuk Lee Lam Thye in the New Straits Times on Feb 17, shortly after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's very obvious concern about the social ills afflicting especially our youths, I feel compelled to write again.

For Dr Mahathir to talk about this subject even in his special Hari Raya Aidilfitri speech says volumes about his concern and frankness in acknowledging the problem.

As always, other ministers and VIPs have followed up with their views and suggestions; with one minister talking about establishing a "national social service" and a major corporate body speaking about initiating Rakan Muda-like programmes for its employees.

I remembered someone pointing out that such character-building should begin at school level, in fact even at pre-school level as by the time the children finish Form Five, a substantial portion of his or her character would have been formed.

I agree with this view as well as Lee's statement that the Education Ministry must ascertain why our schools have not been successful in producing strong and disciplined pupils.

As a parent with two schoolgoing children, I feel the Education Minister must look more often at those "mundane" issues, one of which is reassessing the recruitment and promotion of teachers.

What is the criteria? Is achieving the Bumiputera quota for future teachers, principals and senior education officers more important than ultimately having teachers with the moral fibre and conviction that they are the educators of the Malaysians of tomorrow?

If the recruitment and promotion exercises were to be freed of this criterion, perhaps more people with the appropriate calibre and commitment would be enticed to join the teaching profession.

Recruitment and reward must be based on merit and commitment in order to bring back respect and honour to the teaching profession.

How can indiscipline and social problems not pervade when there is no respect left for teachers?

For example, your child is appointed a prefect and one of his duties is to clean the teachers' staff room.

But the teachers can tell him to order drinks from the canteen and do other tasks for them.

The child, who was initially very excited and honoured at being appointed a prefect, is now disillusioned and begs his parents to write to the school to remove the appointment.

Here's another example: Your child comes home and asks why she was marked wrong for spelling "clothes" as the teacher said it should be spelt "cloths".

And when queried, the teacher had told her: "Don't try to be so smart."

What do you do as a parent? I took the easy way out and told my child that she was right and her teacher wrong but let the teacher be, or else she might be branded as a trouble-maker.

I am not trying to put the sole responsibility of a child's education on the school authorities as we have, even before our children started pre-school, initiated their education, be it teaching them to read and write,

to respect the elders or appreciate the environment.

But what about parents who may not have done so?

Isn't it then the responsibility of the Government to ensure some basic standard of education for the majority and the discipline and character-building of the child?

We hear of the Education Minister talking of SMART schools and single-session schools.

I applaud the initiation of such programmes and I am excited that my children may have the chance to enjoy such an education system.

But amid all this, please do not overlook the constraints that block the education prospects for the average child who makes up the majority of the Malaysians of tomorrow.

They will be the ones to achieve Vision 2020.

The smart ones will make up only 10 to 20 per cent of the population. Please ensure that the rest of the population do not become social neglects.

M.L. Cheang

Kuching

(END)