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Social goals must catch up

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MALAYSIA'S GOAL to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020 has to be the country's biggest ideal. Ever since the Prime Minister unveiled his vision for the country, the figure 2020 has been on almost everyone's lips and minds.

Suddenly, it becomes everyone's favourite number. How many times have we heard well-known personalities and organisations of note echoing this socio-political aspiration of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad?

Vision 2020 incorporates smaller ideals and goals from now until the year 2020 - just 23 years away. The country has to strive to grab opportunities in order to hit a target thought by many to be beyond the reach of developing countries.

Much has been said about Vision 2020. Public figures pepper their speeches with it during functions for dramatic effect. Take a walk along any street and one may come across signs emblazoned with Roti Canai 2020, Ais Kacang 2020 and even Nasi Kandar 2020.

Everyone seems to have hopped onto this 'vision bandwagon,' eagerly awaiting the day when the nation will be pronounced fully industrialised. Will we, however, 'become a nation which is united, with its people possessing self-confidence, supported by firm moral values and ethics...' (as said by the Prime Minister when he unveiled Vision 2020) as we march towards progress?

Recently there has been an avalanche of newspaper reports on youths involving themselves in various unhealthy activities like dadah addiction, lepak and bohsia. Will moral values be further eroded in our fervent quest for development? Some leading public figures seem to think so.

Striving for progress is a good thing, says prominent historian Professor Datuk Khoo Kay Kim. 'Technologically, we should be able to catch up with the West by the year 2020.

'However, emphasis should not only be given to science and technology - it should be balanced with a concern for fellow human beings. If society is topsy-turvy, all the science and technology in the world will not be able to save it.

'A balanced approach should be taken. Right now, the predominant focus is on science and technology. No serious attempts have been made to address social issues.'

Khoo is of the opinion that nothing much has been done thus far where the welfare of youths is concerned. 'We are leaving them to their own devices. There should be reforms in the education system as schools have failed to alleviate the problems concerning youths in the country effectively.'

Khoo, however, is enthusiastic about the developments in the field of science and technology and hopes to witness what further innovations there will be in future. 'I am monitoring the country's progress and hope to be lucky enough to be able to see what it will be like come 2020.'

Former Universiti Malaya vice-chancellor Royal Professor Ungku Aziz says that while reaching out for progress is well and good, Malaysians should ensure that moral values and the welfare of youths are not sidelined in the process.

'Most Malaysians do not seem to comprehend what the word progress means. We should pause and ponder its meaning. Some people may think that being able to own a RM20,000 superbike, or having three credit cards, is what

progress is all about, but it isn't.

`We are getting nearer to Vision 2020 but is society really moving forward, what with youths involving themselves in unhealthy activities and the prevalence of corruption.'

`The rise in the number of dadah addicts and the social ills pervading our society is not what one would call progress. We should realise what the challenges are ahead of us. It is the responsibility of all Malaysians to make sure we move towards the ideal and not away from it.'

Like Khoo, Ungku Aziz also says that he would like to be able to witness the country's transformation to developed nation status. `It will be interesting to see what the country will be like then.'

National Union of Teaching Profession's secretary-general N Siva Subramaniam also strongly agrees that the Prime Minister's vision is a laudable one. However, he says, attention should not only be focused on the development of infrastructure.

`All the development in the world - the skyscrapers, the technology - will be pointless if our society is sick. We definitely have a problem with our youths. Last year, crime statistics showed that 2,500 out of 5,000 crimes committed were carried out by those below age 21.'

Siva feels that the majority of Malaysians equate progress with wealth.

`Most people only think of money when one talks about development. That should not be the case. If this continues to be the trend, our society will be a hollow one come 2020.'

What must be done, he says, is for Malaysians to understand what exactly Vision 2020 means, and part of that vision is to have all forms of social ills eradicated.

`The Prime Minister was very clear on this point when he unveiled Vision 2020. We should, however, not leave it entirely up to the nation's leaders to solve the problem. All Malaysians must step forward and help alleviate the situation.

`Each family unit must have a plan as to how the welfare of their families can be safeguarded. The police, teachers and parents should work together to ensure that schoolchildren do not get involved in unhealthy activities. Hopefully, with concerted efforts from all sides, the country's march towards Vision 2020 will not be clouded over by the spectre of social decay,' Siva concludes.

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