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## The 'Malay Dilemma' revisited

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IT'S sad but true. In the past three years, Malays have topped the crime list for those aged between 10 and 18.

Police statistics reveal that in 1994, the number of arrests for crimes including drug addiction, rape, incest, house break-ins and car thefts stood at 4,192.

Out of this, a total of 1,839 males and 23 females were Malay compared to 590 Chinese males and 18 females, and 421 Indian males and 10 females.

The following year, the number of Malay offenders in this age group rose to 2,402 while the number of Chinese youths arrested totalled 922; 507 Indian youths were caught.

Last year, figures were 2,890 Malays, 770 Chinese (registering a drop) and 574 Indians, with Selangor, Johor and Kedah posting the highest crime rates among youths in the past three years. Malay youths made up the bulk of offenders in all States.

National Unity and Social Development Ministry seem to support the police figures and show that of the 2,898 juvenile cases involving drug abuse and other social problems, 61 per cent of the offenders were Malays, 17 per cent Chinese, and 10 per cent Indians.

In addition, Malays make up at least 70 per cent of inmates at the Henry Gurney School for boys in Malacca.

Professor Mohd Dahlan Aman, of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, believes the problem stems from the urbanisation process of the Malay community and the inability of some quarters to manage the emerging urban environment.

In his book *The Malay Dilemma*, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "Rural people everywhere are less sophisticated and progressive than urban people.

"Essentially, because of environmental and hereditary factors, the Malays have become a rural race with only a minute portion of them in the towns. Thus, we must seek to urbanise the Malays."

Basically, this is what's happening today. However, Dahlan says the Malays now need to contend with both the urbanisation and industrialisation processes.

"The Malaysian Chinese had gone through this phase when they were subjected to urbanisation during colonial times. While the Chinese participated in the colonial urban enclave, the Malays were kept within the traditional Malay world.

"This scenario can be traced back to the second half of 19th-century Malaya," explains the professor of anthropology of development.

Dahlan adds that the reason reports show a higher crime rate among Malays in Selangor, Johor and Kedah is because the three States are developing more rapidly than the other States in the country.

"When a State or country undergoes industrialisation, lifestyles change and because the Malay community is now undergoing this process, they are caught in the midst of this urban transformation."

Dahlan highlights a similar situation in the West when it was industrialising in the 19th century.

"Child labour was used then to meet the demands of industrialisation. And during the initial stages, there was a high rate of suicides among teens.

"This was a major concern in the later half of the 19th century and early 20th century in Europe that even called for renowned sociologists to

conduct Anomie studies."

In addition, Dahlan points out that Malay society is facing an expanding middle class which is still in its formative stage and has yet to stabilise.

"The emerging Malay middle class is still not in control of the middle-class professional sub-culture. In one aspect the Malays have been successful in their economic pursuit. On the other hand, they are thrown into conflict between the values of their past and the values that are emerging within the urban environment.

"The Malays need to balance their economic success with ethics and religion and the community must help in the development and well being of our youths."

Among other solutions, Dahlan suggests, is the urgent need for family members to forge stronger and closer ties and understanding among each other while the young should be inculcated with religious values.

"As extended families become increasingly rare and nuclear families become more dominant, the focus should be on the inculcation and promotion of the spirit or the social soul of the family.

"This kinship soul prevails in some quarters but not in others and those who have missed out on this spirit feel that they no longer get psychological support from the family.

"Whatever they do, it matters very little to the family. They then gain more support from those who are not family members as the soul of the extended family is gone. This often happens in the emerging urban environment."

Universiti Malaya's Dr Chia Oai Ping, from the Department of Chinese Studies, echoes Dahlan's views.

"I recently spoke to a number of successful Malay women who are active members of several associations. I asked them how they divided their time between their careers, businesses, social activities, and their time with their children at home.

"These women felt that it was the government's job to take care of their children as they were doing their part in contributing to the development of the nation.

"Many of them have sent their children to boarding school and said that they were already doing their part to earn for their children's well-being.

"I think the problem Malay youths are facing today started after the implementation of the New Economic Policy. With the implementation of the policy, Malay parents started sending their children to boarding schools for better facilities and education.

"While the schools could provide discipline, these children were too young and lacked parental guidance and care. They were thrown in the deep end at a young age. And when they came back they couldn't cope with the situation here.

"As for the Chinese, since the New Economic Policy, they have been forced to study and work harder. Chinese parents ensure that their children study harder to get a place in university.

"It also has a lot to do with culture. The Chinese believe that there are five basic factors that affect their lives. While faith, luck and 'repayment' for their fathers deeds' or misdeeds are decided by the gods, feng shui and studying hard are factors that can be altered to affect their lives for the better."

Chia feels that bringing up children is not the responsibility of the government or teachers but the parents. "No matter how busy a parent is, he or she should devote time to caring for their own young.

"Being busy is not an excuse. Without their parents, children would look

elsewhere for help and this is when they come into contact with bad influences."

Chia also attributes the growing problem of crime among Malay youths to big families in smaller homes. There are usually six members to a Chinese family as compared to 10 in a Malay one.

"When there is no space at home, the children will be compelled to go out and this could also be when they meet with the negative forces," Chia explains.

Supporting Chia's argument are research figures from the Children's Welfare Council which reveal that 90 per cent of Chinese youths aged 15 go straight home after school. Seventy-two per cent of Indian youths also go home after school compared with 58 per cent of Malay youths.

However, she adds that the high figure of crimes committed by Malay youths could also be a natural reflection of the country's ethnic composition. "The Malays make up nearly 60 per cent of the population while the Chinese only make up 28 per cent."

Meanwhile Professor Ibrahim Komoo, who is with UKM's Institute of Environment and Development, feels that the police and National Unity and Social Development Ministry's statistics may not be totally correct.

"The Chinese practise a closed culture. They tend to ensure that problems do not leak out. For instance, if rape occurs, it would not be reported and this means there would not be a record of it. Remember, most of these cases are reported by the parents of parties involved.

"This is unlike the Malays who tend to be more open."

But assuming the statistics are correct, Ibrahim says that this Malay dilemma could be the consequence of rapid development which demands that people adapt and change as swiftly and smoothly as possible.

"The Malays have been caught by surprise by this rapid development and are quite unprepared. The Chinese however are better able to cope with changes.

"It also seems as if Malays who have become rich almost overnight cannot adjust and adapt to their new social class.

"This is a typical symptom of cultural deterioration or shock where the Malays have to leave their traditional culture behind but do not have any new direction or way of doing things. And this is when social ills tend to set in."

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