

13/02/1998

Nostalgic Raya at Rumah Pengasih

Mazlan Nordin

VERY rarely would one witness Indonesian youths singing the dikir barat with Kelantanese friends. And with gusto too.

This then was the scene at the Hari Raya open house last Sunday at Rumah Pengasih, a sort of halfway house for those who have undergone dadah rehabilitation programmes. There are some 90 voluntary inmates at the centre, and present at the festive gathering were families from various parts of the country, including from Penang, Kedah and the East Coast States.

There are also about 230 Indonesians at the hostel and their families had come all the way from Jakarta for the occasion.

On a nostalgic note were two songs by the Indonesians and obvious from the lyrics was that they dearly missed their kampungs. As they sang their fathers were clicking away with their cameras and so recorded in each family album is a sad part of their lives.

The centre is situated along a part of the highway leading up north, and in the spacious grounds are dormitories for the residents. There is no fencing or locked gates anywhere and anyone can just cross the road to make a bolt for it. This has not happened as all residents are aware that their stay there is for their own good after having gone halfway in the rehabilitative process.

Some had indeed gone home for several days to celebrate Hari Raya. Those from Indonesia had joined their parents and siblings staying at several Kuala Lumpur hotels, and all had returned to the centre.

In his welcome address the centre's director, Haji Mohd Yunus disclosed that a similar hostel would be set up in Jakarta soon. It would be wholly funded by families of those wishing to continue their rehabilitative programme.

Its opening would obviate the need for Indonesian parents to send their sons to the centre in Kuala Lumpur.

The guest of honour at the gathering was Datuk Seri Faezah Datuk Shuaib, wife of Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayub, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister and head of Pemadam over the past decade.

Welcoming the scores of family members, some obviously affluent, she expressed hope yet again that those who had undergone the dadah rehabilitation programmes would find acceptance in society and be welcomed back by their families. "Rejection by their own family members might well cause them to seek love, or the substitute of love, outside the family fold," she reminded.

Faezah is also head of Penawar, a counselling group.

Much is hoped for from the co-operative effort to set up the Jakarta hostel. Mayhabs some of the lessons in Malaysia could be applied there.

As of last year there were 200,000 registered addicts, but out of the total only 50,000 have undergone rehabilitation in 20 centres throughout the country.

Megat Junid had earlier announced that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had approved the use of naltrexone to treat dadah addicts and an allocation of RM3 million would be used for a pilot project.

According to him an initial 2,000 selected addicts would be treated with naltrexone with priority given to those who came forward voluntarily.

Naltrexone, a narcotic antagonist, has been reported to be effective in treating dadah addicts. It works by blocking the opiate receptor sites on

the cell membranes where the dadah takes effect. If a person on naltrexone takes an opiate, it would have no addictive effect.

It comes in tablet form and is said to have a long-term effect by keeping heroin or other opiate addicts off dadah.

Mohd Yunus, called Yeop by everyone there, including inmates, is president of Persatuan Pengasih Malaysia, a self-help group which undertakes various programmes for drug addicts and also HIV-positive carriers. The group was given a boost by Malaysian AIDS council president Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir recently.

Much remains to be done and for Mohd Yunus who had undergone training programmes and courses in drug rehabilitation programmes in the United States, the setting up of a Rumah Pengasih in Jakarta is seen as a small contribution in the process of co-operation.

Co-operation between two countries is always considered as being implemented primarily at official level between government functionaries, ministries or departments. Shown at the outset on television and published in newspapers would be pictures of the signing ceremony witnessed by the President or Prime Minister.

No less important, however, are bilateral ties effected at the people-to-people level without fanfare, and only occasionally do they come to public knowledge. May there be more of these by such as Pengasih.

(END)