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Do not marginalise the young

IT is with the young that the future of the country rests. It follows therefore the aspirations of the country, in socio-economic development, should be tinged with the hopes as well as the fears of the youth. They will be the future leaders; they will, collectively, man the cogs of the economic engine. So it would be wise to listen to their voice, to take note of their perceptions both of which are not and will not always be in sync with the vision and the road taken by leaders of the country. For the young, by nature, by temper and by zeal, are given to idealism. That sentiment is neither good nor bad in itself. But it has to be tempered by realities of life.

This is one conviction that the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has grasped. Socio-economic and political developments of the past few months appeared to have marginalised the views of the young. This is manifested in their fears that their hopes have not been given due consideration by the country's decision makers, whether in politics, economics or education. And so Dr Mahathir addressed about 100 leaders of 20 youth movements, representing a broad spectrum of the country's youth in a two-hour dialogue on Monday.

From the feedback provided by many leaders of youth movements, the session organised by the Youth and Sports Ministry was beneficial. Indeed, one youth leader even described it as "very enlightening". Dr Mahathir briefed the gathering on the steps taken by the Government and the role the young should play to revive the economy. He explained the concept of patriotism and how they could inculcate this noble ideal in their lives. He answered candidly questions on Malaysia's international role, the country's road to economic development and the proposed Hudud laws. In sum, as another youth movement leader described it, the session was an "eye-opener".

We share Young Malaysian Movement president's assessment that if political and economic issues are explained to the young, they can rationalise and accept them. For they too have a mind, an open mind, however idealistic their actions might manifest their thoughts through actions at times. And so we support the call by another youth official that Government leaders should emulate the example initiated by the Prime Minister.

Cabinet ministers, Mentris Besar and Chief Ministers were urged to hold regular dialogues with the young to explain current issues. We also agree with the view that the Government should open more channels of communication to explicate to the young programmes and policies, especially those that affect their education and lives. Through these channels they should listen and consider their grievances.

In this regard we applaud the move by the Education Ministry to conduct one-day seminars at 14 centres nationwide. In these sessions new university entrants would be briefed on life as undergraduates, on the various loans available to them and, more importantly, the talks would enable the students to have a better understanding of national policies. The sessions, to be held on Friday and which has an impressive list of ministers and deputy ministers, are testimony to the Government's realisation that the young have a role to play in nation building, that they should not be marginalised and that it is far, far better to explain national issues to them directly.

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