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Too much of the good life makes Malaysian youth mere softies

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said recently Malaysia needs more "resilient and outgoing" youths to emulate the feat of sailor Datuk Azahar Mansor to bring glory to the country.

Ideally, he said, the younger generation should be prepared to face danger for the benefit of the country "just like what Datuk Azahar Mansor did a year ago".

Dr Mahathir said this when he launched an Internet portal and a documentary on the Jalur Gemilang Challenge at Awana Porto Malai Resort in Langkawi.

He said there were other types of challenges that Malaysians could embark on such as climbing Mount Everest or crossing the deserts alone to prove that they were prepared for adventure no matter how dangerous it might seem.

However, the problem with our youth today is that they have been having too much of the good life. Many have given up playing games or exercising, and are merely contented in becoming couch potatoes. As a result, the majority of them are not as tough and resilient as previous generations.

In late 1991, an army chief expressed concern that recruits were "physical and mental weaklings" although they appeared rugged in appearance.

Lt-Jen Datuk Othman Haron, who was then acting army chief, blamed the emphasis on "rock culture" over that of adventure, religion, physical resilience and prowess for turning out poor soldier material.

He said the only requirement they met was academic qualifications.

"However these qualifications are not matched by the necessary physical resilience, positive attitude and spirit which are crucial if they are to be good soldiers," he said.

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation have resulted in an increase in the occurrence of negative social behaviour such as drug addiction, loafing, juvenile delinquency and unhealthy lifestyles.

These problems impose strains on the family unit and can impair the moral fabric of future generations if they are not overcome now.

Abu Bakar Mat, 63, adviser to the Penang 4B Youth Movement, branded the present generation of youth as "a bunch of softies with no patriotic spirit".

"They have not faced the hardships endured by previous generations during the colonial era and the Japanese Occupation. They are not even playing games like football and prefer indulging themselves in taking drugs, Ecstasy pills and participating in illegal motor racing," he said.

Bakar, however, blamed their elders for not showing them the way and called for a bridging of the generation gap.

Anwar Khan, secretary of the Penang Silat Council, said today's youth were not as tough and resilient as they did not participate in strenuous games.

"It is not fair to blame parents for this state of affairs. People are simply better off today. But indulging in video games have turned the young into softies," he said.

Anwar has helped to train about one thousand youth in the art of silat over the last decade. "But if you are too tough on them, they will never show up again," he said ruefully.

Factory manager Chang Chuen Bin said today's youth had become 'soft' by

spending too much time on computers.

He said the popularity of hand-held games such as 'Pokemon' and 'Game Boy' resulted in less time being spent on physical activities.

"Basically, most people are better off today and families are getting smaller. Parents tend to spoil their children who soon become obese," he said.

He suggested that both the public and private sector should send young workers for courses at the Outward Bound School to make them aware of their physical limitations.

"We should create more role models like Azahar Mansor and have champions in different fields. This will show that Malaysia can also produce world champions. Our youth will be mediocre if they do not have heroes to look up to, or targets to aim for," he said.

P. Mohan, a national committee member of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, said most people were now not so interested in taking part in youth activities and sports.

"In the 1970s, people joined youth clubs, played games and carried out social activities although there was not much incentive. Today, they have become more materialistic. Those with lower incomes have to work extra hours to keep up with the rising cost of living and so have no time for other activities," he said.

Mohan also criticised the sports situation in the country where certain sports get fantastic awards to the detriment of other games.

"Our footballers and badminton players for example are given too much. And what have they achieved so far? They often play without pride and spirit," he said.

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