

25/08/2001

Ensure Malaysians are equipped for the Digital Age

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - It is not enough to provide a child with just the basic necessities of food and shelter, it is also necessary to prepare them for the challenges of the future.

The Digital Age, with issues such as the Internet and k-economy, and the Multimedia Super Corridor have begun to empower the Malaysian economy and the Malaysian mind, especially young Malaysians.

But the question that needs to be asked is how do these help to empower the poor or deprived child.

The fear that the digital divide is widening due to the gap between the rich and the poor does not bode well for the child of the future.

Steps must be taken to ensure the nation progresses evenly.

This would mean that those who need technology the most would be the ones to receive it. Only then would it truly empower the child.

It is appalling to find that in the 10 years since the last World Summit for Children, there are still children in many parts of the world who do not have access to basic health facilities.

Quite a few are sold or trafficked across countries, and end up in life-threatening occupations.

Through the concerted efforts of the Government, corporate sector, non-governmental organisations as well as international bodies, Malaysia has achieved success in ensuring the well-being of its children.

The National Unity and Social Development Ministry, through the Second National Plan for Action for Children 2001-2020, has initiated several programmes for children in the country.

The Welfare Department, a department under the ministry, has implemented programmes aimed at meeting the basic requirements of children.

These include programmes on preventive, rehabilitative, protective and developmental care.

The Health Ministry, meanwhile, has contributed to child healthcare and a better quality of life for many, while the Education Ministry has, since the 1980s, moved towards ensuring that every child has the right to an education.

The Town and Country Planning Act 1976 advocates the concept of a child-friendly environment which are also disabled-friendly.

These efforts will culminate in the grand launch of the "Say Yes for Children" by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Sept 1 at the Sunway Convention Centre in Petaling Jaya.

The event will see 5,000 children and adults gather together to pledge their commitment to the well-being of children in this nation.

The "Say Yes for Children" campaign is a a global programme aimed at involving people from all walks of life in issues that affect children's lives.

Ten critical areas will be highlighted in the campaign. These are "Leave No Child Out", "Put Children First", "Care for Every Child", "Fight HIV/AIDS", "Stop Harming and Exploiting Children", "Listen to Children", "Educate Every Child", "Protect Children from War", "Protect the Earth for Children" and "Fight Poverty: Invest in Children".

The messages for the campaign, taken from local communities and cyberspace, will be taken to the Special Session on Children at the United Nations General Assembly next month.

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