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## Help stem moral slump

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OF late, people from all walks of life have expressed their thoughts about the dire need for ethics and morality in all aspects of life.

In line with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's (NST, July 11, 1999), and Education Minister's Tan Sri Musa Muhammad's call (NST, Feb 13) for a new code of ethics and morality to be introduced at all levels of our educational institutions, I hope the current move to revamp the education system will give ethics and morality their appropriate place in the 21st century.

Musa said the "new morality ethics" would include values people need to face the challenges of a globalised era, and civics - the relationship of individuals to society.

"There needs to be increased focus on certain values like honesty ... and the willingness to work hard," he said.

Humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer wrote that the underlying cause for the severe crises of 20th century civilisation was the lack of true ethics.

The frequent reports of unethical behaviour by people in responsible positions certainly suggest that we are ethically apathetic and negligent.

It is indeed alarming that people who hold key positions in business, law, government, military, education, politics, religion and voluntary organisations are bright, competent, efficient and articulate, but ethically lax.

Recent examples range from misuse of power, authority and public funds to black mail and corruption.

It is equally alarming that large numbers of our citizens are:

- \* relatively undisturbed by the apparent wrongdoings of people in positions of power;
- \* shell-shocked by the numerous and flagrant unethical actions of otherwise respected people; and,
- \* confused and bewildered by the questionable behaviour of these trusted leaders.

While all the factors contributing to the current wave of unethical actions are difficult to identify, in my judgment, it is the conspicuous absence of the study of ethics and morality in the education curricula that is partially responsible for such occurrences.

For some time now, contemporary writers, teachers, preachers, community leaders and critics at large have been urging that our education system give careful attention to the study of right conduct.

Schools should be helping children to look within themselves, and from this self-knowledge derive a set of values. Values per se are not adequately taught in our schools today.

It is neither wise nor practical to remain ethically illiterate just as it is neither wise nor practical to remain scientifically and IT illiterate.

Just as studies have developed around ethnic relations and environmental literacy, education must necessarily include a meaningful study of ethics and morality, to investigate right or "acceptable human conduct" and what is ultimately good or desirable for people.

Although the definition of acceptable conduct varies between countries, the core ethical values - respect, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, responsibility, civic virtue and citizenship - transcend geographical and

cultural barriers.

Full humanity cannot be achieved unless a culture and its institutions encourage goodness.

So it behoves the education system to do what is within its power to provide all learners with knowledge concerning ethics and morality and with opportunities to apply such knowledge.

Indeed, an education system which ignores the responsibility of instructing its youths in ethics and morality is not only self-defeating, but also life-negating.

Not only would the study of ethics and morality help our youths arrive at what constitutes good conduct, it would also offer them knowledge of general philosophy, history, economics and political science.

It would enable them to better interpret such disciplines from different perspectives while they are introduced to theology, psychology, sociology, and even law.

In the process of revamping our education system, let our students be taught to be ethical as well as innovative, creative, and analytical.

The revamp should be pursued vigorously, so that we can avoid the path taken by traditional education, which has pushed ethics and morality almost completely aside.

Otherwise, the education system must continue to accept much of the blame for the present moral slump.