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Hunting season begins for Malaysian youths

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THE bugle has sounded and the hunting season has started.

The game are Malaysian youths, especially the ones sporting weird hairdos and lepakng (loafing) on staircases at shopping complexes or isolated alcoves.

Anyone and everyone who is connected no matter how remotely to an organisation can participate.

And like cornered prey, these youths are huddling even closer together, seeking comfort in each other.

It does not have to be this way, but at the rate things are going and the zeal with which some quarters are pursuing the matter, these young people can only end up even more isolated.

A picture, as the saying goes, is worth a thousand words.

Local newspapers carried one a couple of days ago showing a group of Bukit Bintang Umno Youth members checking out a spot at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) which is suspected to be a den for youths indulging in immoral activities.

The hunt was conducted at midnight on Sunday; the Umno members were not that successful, bagging only spoils like woman's underwear, cigarettes and condoms; no big game, but it was still enough to confirm their suspicions of the existence of negative elements among the youths loitering in the area.

This spotlight on unhealthy activities of youths who frequent the KLCC started with Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin bringing the matter to the attention of the Umno supreme council and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently.

Based on information acquired by the Bukit Bintang Umno Youth chief Ab. Rauf Yusof, the youths - apart from turning the spot into a haven for smoking pot and indulging in free sex - were also dangerous.

He claimed they had armed themselves with steel pipes and arrows and had assaulted the building's security personnel.

Ab. Rauf would have done his homework, as nobody has come forward to dispute his allegations. Those with an interest in helping to resolve problems faced by youths are rightly concerned about the danger and threat, and the media had helped fan the issue.

But the question is why did it take this long for Umno Youth, the authorities and others concerned to see the threat these youths present, to themselves as well as to society.

After all, the KLCC is not some isolated or abandoned building. It is a popular office and shopping complex, and the pride of the nation.

The attention on the youths at the KLCC comes at the time when the nation is being fed with a daily diet of the heretical activities of the Black Metal groups first uncovered in Sungai Petani.

And the majority of the established citizenry, upright and law-abiding, would welcome the intensified efforts to monitor, and punish or rehabilitate these derailed youths.

Of course, Umno Youth's concern cannot be dismissed. In fact, the approach it adopted in trying to get close to these youths, rather than simply calling for them to be rounded up and summarily dealt with, should be complimented.

It is a refreshing departure from the usual finger-pointing and fault-finding, a good start that can be followed up with genuine efforts to help

the aimless and directionless share in the nation's ideals.

In more ways than one, the problems of these youths are a microcosm of a larger issue, especially for the Malay Muslims.

And some people have been quick to take note that it looks like the greater the emphasis placed on religious education, the bigger the problem with moral misconduct.

Efforts to inculcate good values, they say, may have been blunted by the fact that an equal emphasis had been placed on worldly pursuits as well; never mind that the other communities do not seem to face the problem, when by all accounts their drive for material things are even more intense.

Nevertheless, the efforts of the Umno Youth should help the movement, and the party as a whole, in rebuilding an image tarnished over the years by excesses of certain former leaders.

It is good that the members are attempting to get back to the basics of serving the nation. But it will take time, not least in changing the perception of the organisation being elitist and only interested in landing government projects.

Umno Youth would of course also have to look within to ensure that it is in a position to play saviour to the wayward youths. Constant self-scrutiny will be required, more so than ever before.

If it fails to improve its own lot, Umno Youth can expect only one thing - the hunter will become the hunted, and it will not be seasonal.

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