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Safeguarding planet for the future of our children

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KHAIRIL Amanda and Khairil Azri welcomed their guests into the big hall of the Sunway Lagoon resort with much enthusiasm. "Welcome to our world", the two teenagers said to the delight of some 5,000 children and parents who had gathered to witness the launch of the "Say Yes For Children" campaign.

The two were selected to be masters of ceremony for the occasion, which was graced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. It was a gathering of children of all ages, from pre-school to secondary school, dressed in their school uniform.

I jumped into one lift taking the children to the main hall. They looked very eager and excited. "Nak jumpa PM? (Meeting the PM?)," I asked. "Yes" the dear ones chorused. They trooped out of the elevator two by two and were guided by their teachers into the hall.

Once inside, the chatter of pre-schoolers hits like the sound of bees. But this was fine as they were well-behaved. Some sat on the floor, dressed in their best baju Melayu, cheongsam, kurta and school garb. The two emcees tried to advise them to reduce their chatter but it was futile.

There were two large movie screens in the hall which enabled everyone to observe what was going on outside. When the screens showed pictures of Dr Mahathir arriving and making his way to the main hall, the children in the hall rose and applauded.

It took quite a while before the PM could find his way to his seat. The children had rushed out to shake his and his wife's hands, while a few had asked for his autograph. The children knew that this was their day and kept protocol to a minimum.

The "Say Yes For Children" campaign is part of a global effort to make the world realise the significance of children, that adults ruling the earth must be made to realise that one of their duties is to safeguard the planet for the future. And the children are the future.

A total of 121 children from at least five schools and a unity kindergarten in Kuala Lumpur then performed a sketch which depicted the country's early history right to the day when it gained independence 44 years ago. They were accompanied by the UiTM symphony orchestra.

All parents would have neglected their children at one point or the other. In between work and other commitments, parents would have left their children in someone else's care. While this may have been unavoidable at times, the fact remains that caring for children is very much the parents' responsibility.

Details of the campaign have been extensively highlighted by this newspaper. Countries all over the world will meet at the United Nations in New York later this month to state their case for children in their countries. Minister of National Unity and Community Development Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman will lead Malaysia's delegation to the world body.

When I saw the sketch, I recalled another performed by 15 teenagers in Kampala, Uganda, about two weeks ago. The Ugandan Government is bringing the children to the UN to make their case.

Performing before leaders who attended the South African International Dialogue, the children put up a show reminding the world of its responsibilities to the children of the world.

I hope our Minister, too, will be able to put forward our case well on behalf of all children.

