

17/07/2001

Stamping out social scourge

ARMED robberies. Rapes. Murders. These vicious and horrendous crimes are occurring with increasing frequency and the rash of high profile cases in the past fortnight has set the alarm bells ringing. There is consternation and a sense of hopelessness in reading of a young girl being brutalised, of a toddler having his throat slit and babies and children sexually assaulted.

Equally disturbing is that many of these crimes are perpetrated by young people. Such acts are inhuman, even bestial and seemingly insane. It has set many people thinking as to what is happening in our society. Where have we gone wrong?

The easy way out is to regard all these as mere aberrations and hope that the temporary madness afflicting some people will run its course and life will return to normal. But reality dictates that we have to examine the reasons for these crimes. The spate of violent criminal acts is certainly not characteristic of our society but we have to find ways to snuff them out if we do not want to hear the police siren shattering the silence of the night every few minutes, as is the situation in the ghettos of some countries.

If an increase in the crime rate is part of the price of progress, then we will have to nip early this negative aspect of development. The prime concern in eradicating such social ills comes from no less than Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who has called on society to work together in this effort.

Public co-operation in reporting cases of sexual abuse is a noteworthy contribution in helping to nab criminals. It will also ease the burden of the police in curbing serious crimes. The ultimate objective is a relatively crime-free society to mould tomorrow's leaders.

The courts must continue to impose deterrent sentences on convicted offenders for the dastardly acts of violence. More so when young minds are the subject of their influence and perpetration. Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Shahrizat Jalil said on Saturday that the easy availability of VCDs strutting smut stuff has directly or indirectly contributed to the occurrence of many rape cases in the country. More troubling is the fact that they are available to schoolchildren who regard sex as something of a mystery and must be tried. This is where the danger lies.

Impressionable youngsters are at a stage when they are learning to tell right from wrong and if they are not smart enough to sieve out the smut, they can easily fall by the wayside with unsavoury consequences.

Parental guidance is a must during a child's formative years. They must inculcate in their offspring that home is where the heart is. The fundamental equation is that a happy, healthy family is the basis of moulding happy, critical-thinking children who have a sense of belonging.

It is not enough for parents to provide just the bare necessities of food, shelter and clothing. They must help mould in their children moral and intellectual fibre that will empower them to make informed choices. Similarly, teachers have to encourage children to resist peer pressure.

The universal values of integrity, caring and sharing have served us well for generations and there is no reason to discard them in this information age. If anything, we need them even more. We need not press the panic button in acting to curb social ills. But we must not leave to

tomorrow what we can do today.
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