

03/09/2001

Time to act

MUCH has been said about the disturbing decline in the standard of national schools, but not enough has been done about arresting the declining trend and reversing it. Otherwise, the decline would not have continued and elicited expressions of concern from various quarters, ranging from teachers themselves to parents, educationists and social activists.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when opening the Malay Education Congress, stressed the urgency of doing something concrete about the decline in the standard of national schools. In his characteristic forthright manner, the Prime Minister has called on educationists to pinpoint the reasons for the decline and act to overcome the shortcomings. He also said that they should be willing to accept the real reasons even if these exposed past mistakes.

It is human nature for a person not to admit to his mistakes because it hurts his self-esteem. Besides, nobody wants to be proven wrong and possibly become a laughing stock.

But in the conduct of human affairs, especially in an endeavour like educating our children, it is better to accept the truth of past mistakes because if we do not change so as to redress these mistakes, then the younger generation will have to bear the consequences of the folly of the older generation.

It would be tragic if, for no reason other than our selfish reluctance to come to terms with our past mistakes, changes are not made to arrest the decline in the standard of national schools, most of whose students are Malays.

The children who are being educated in the national schools deserve a better quality all-round education, with added emphasis on science and mathematics. Their grasp of the English Language should be improved so that they are equipped with a command of written and spoken English that is sufficient to enable them to participate meaningfully in the world of IT and the k-economy.

Religious studies and moral education are important to strengthen the moral fibre and character of students. But they should not go to such an extreme in focusing on such subjects that they neglect others that are essential if they want to acquire the required skills and knowledge to compete in an increasingly globalised world.

The globalisation process will impose tremendous pressures on emerging and newly-industrialising countries such as Malaysia which are being compelled to open up its economy to foreign competition. If the standard of education is high that becomes easier.

Therefore, every Malaysian should be adequately prepared to face the intense competition that will inevitably come our way. The national schools must buck up and upgrade to educate the young in the way that will prepare them to live and compete in a globalised world when they grow up. We cannot afford to allow blinkered people to exert too much influence on what should or should not be done in the national schools because this would be detrimental to providing good education.

The educationists who help to frame educational policies and implement them have a heavy responsibility on their shoulders in clearly identifying the causes for the decline in the standard of national schools and finding solutions. They should undertake the task objectively and should not gloss

over anything. We should not waste any more time. It is time to act.  
(END)