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Feature: Family

"HOME SWEET HOME" VERSUS "HOME BITTER HOME"

By: Cik Rashidah Bt Abd Ghani

KUALA LUMPUR: Most people today are on the run the moment they leave their home in the morning either for work, business meetings, golf or catching up with friends.

The bigger and busier the place where they live in, the more they rush.

And they probably rationalise that they are doing all this to make a better life for themselves and their families.

The irony is that however unintentional it is, they neglect their families in search for a better life.

Director General of the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) Fatimah Saad said the family is where life begins and the family forms the foundation for a national environment conducive to social stability and economic progress.

The state and circumstances of families, to some extent, are reliable indicators of the general development situation of countries.

In this regard, family has often been described as the first building block of society which is responsible for the human resource development in producing quality population.

The role of the family in Malaysia is very crucial as the development of the human potential is part of the nine challenges stated in Vision 2020.

Competitiveness, productivity, innovativeness and capability in management of new technologies in Malaysia will be determined by the quality of its human resources, she said.

Fatimah said the population of Malaysia has increased from 18.38 million in 1991 to 23.27 million in 2000, growing at an average rate of 2.6 percent per annum. About 63 percent of the population in 2000 were in the working age group of 15-64, while 33 percent were below the age of 15 and four percent were in the age group 65 and above. The median age of the population was 23.9 years.

In line with the population increase, the number of households have increased from 3.6 million in 1991 to 4.9 million in 2000 growing at an average of 3.4 percent per annum, she explained.

PROGRESS ADDS PRESSURE ON FAMILY

Deputy Director General of the National Population and Family Development Board Khoo Swee Khen said the family, the basic unit of society, is experiencing change in today's scenario of rapid progress.

There is a weakening of family ties, growing conflict between the demands of work and family care as husbands and wives work outside the home, thus increasing their dependence on hired maids/child-minders.

The growing concern today is the breakdown of the family system. Parents are facing a more hostile social environment vis-a-vis the values they would like to teach their children. Violence is rampant in the world. Pornography in the Net and casual sex are only a few of the many threats to their value system.

In fact, the changing landscape of the family today has made it so different in its structure and patterns that one can see the widening gap between generations in the same family.

Reported cases of violence in the family, are only the tip of the iceberg. Several other social problems on the rise need solutions and urgently, she said.

Also on the rise today are single parents and absent parents. Parents' working hours are longer instead of being shorter. Contrary to what is expected of advance technological help, there is lesser leisure time with the children. One common complaint children have of their parents is they don't seem to have time for the family.

THE IMPORTANT OF FAMILY UNIT

Dr Rozumah Baharudin of Universiti Putra Malaysia said the family is the first and most important context for human development. The composition of the context is therefore crucial for a developing person.

The family is the first community every child knows. Indeed it is the family that shapes the child's character as he or she learns values and virtues as well as mores and practices in the context of the family's culture. Yet today, as families prosper and lifestyle change, the very institution of the family itself is "under siege".

That means that any success in social engineering will have to go back to basics, foremost of which is that "parenting is a very challenging task and must be planned wisely."

Thus parents who perform their parenting tasks wisely and seriously will ensure that their children achieve their full potentials.

Duties and obligations of a parent is to restrain children from committing sin, establish them in virtuous deeds, educate them in arts and sciences, encourage them to find suitable spouses, give them their inheritance at the proper time, said NPFDB's Khoo.

NATIONAL POLICY MECHANISM

NPFDB's Fatimah said the general objective of the Board which is under the Ministry of Women and Family Development, is to contribute towards the development of society through the strengthening and improvement of family well-being by coordinating, developing and implementing national family development programmes.

Concerted efforts have been made by the Ministry to gain support and participation of other government agencies and non-government organisations and corporate sector in order to ensure more effective programme implementation.

There are also various other policies and laws that offer protection for families and their members, such as the Domestic Violence Act, National Policy on Women, and Children Act.

This means that the authorities are well aware of the fact that the family is the first foundation for a strong and progressive nation, as embodied by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's statement: "A strong stable and healthy family will be able to produce children who are responsible, loyal, cultured, resilient, mature and caring. These noble qualities can contribute towards an excellent future generation." --
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