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Here and out there

By Nurshafenath Shaharuddin

MISSED out on the news? Never fear, here are some of the events that happened in Malaysia and around the world from June 23 to 29.

MALAYSIA

Move the cybercafes

CONCERNED over the rising number of schoolchildren found whiling away the hours at the numerous cybercafes, often unproductively, Education Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein has proposed a solution - relocating cybercafes as far away from schools as possible.

In his opinion, their proximity to schools is what makes them so appealing to youngsters. The statement came about when he conducted yet another spot check accompanied by officers and the media, and discovered a cybercafe packed with students, oblivious to anything but the content on their screens.

He will discuss with the Housing and Local Government Ministry how to put his idea into effect.

HIV/AIDS statistics shocker

HERE'S something that will alter your preconceptions - more housewives and children are diagnosed with HIV or develop AIDS than sex workers in Malaysia. How many more? Chew on these figures: from 1986 to 2003, 1,120 housewives and 467 children under 12 were diagnosed as HIV-positive compared with only 347 sex workers. During the same period, 217 housewives and 134 children under 12 developed AIDS. Sex workers? Only 43.

The statistics released by the Malaysian AIDS Council imply a review of the current awareness campaign is needed. The current campaigns are said to be too narrow, according to council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, and targets only drug addicts and sex workers, when the public at large should be made aware that there is a link between these two groups and the public. For example, a HIV-positive husband (whether he's an addict or a frequent brothel-goer) can infect his spouse, who may subsequently infect their baby.

On a more positive note, the number of cases of HIV and AIDS has dropped, but although there is a general decline, the cases involving women have increased.

Where art thou, NS dodgers?

OUT of the 8,559 who shirked National Service and had their names published in the papers weeks ago, only 1,929 came forward to register for the special training programme. The remainder will soon find summonses awaiting them. If they ignore that too, then it's arrest warrants. The Government means business. For those who did register, the main excuse given for shirking was ignorance that their names had been listed for NS. About 200 have either applied for deferment or exemption.

On the next NS programme, it has been decided that the character-building, nation-building and physical modules will be conducted simultaneously, thereby excising the need for the trainees to transfer locations halfway through their programme.

Other regulations: The number of trainees at camps is to be limited to 400, and while gender segregation will not be implemented, these will be clearer rules on the interaction between male and female trainees.

Handphones will be under the safekeeping of camp commandants (selected from army officers) and are only to be used during weekends and emergencies. Families can visit only twice a month and the menu will be

expanded to accommodate vegetarians and those with special diet requirements.

Haze to stay

GET your face masks ready for it looks like the current haze is set to last for about another month. It is caused mainly by uncontrolled open burning in Sumatra whereby smoke particles are getting blown to our shores. Poor enforcement by Indonesia may result in the haze situation lasting for some time. Indonesia's Environment Minister has given an assurance that every effort is being made to combat the cause of these fires (illegal slash-and-burn land clearing), but the lag between regulations and law enforcement cannot be helped, apparently. Despite promises to prosecute plantation companies, little action has been taken. Let's just hope it won't get as bad as 1997's occurrence.

UNITED STATES

It pays to keep cool

A STUDY of 4,000 young adults have shown that not flying off the handle does have a long-term benefit: those who kept a cool head under stress are less likely to develop high blood pressure when middle aged.

The study started in 1985 and initially it was to study the history of cardiovascular diseases. It found that those who had large blood pressure responses to stress had a greater risk of developing blood pressure. And the risk is independent of other known risk factors such as race, gender, education, age and body mass index. It confirms previous studies done on the relationship between blood pressure and stress to the future development of hypertension.

So keep your cool.

Britney lost about love?

IT'S hard not to comment on how once-reigning pop princess Britney Spears seems to have got it all backwards. First, she got married. Then, it didn't happen. Then, she had an affair. And now, she's getting engaged.

Even if he already has a child with an actress (with the second on the way), Kevin Federline is Britney's latest beau. A 26-year-old dancer in her concert tour, it is unknown if the couple has immediate plans to marry. At the moment, Spears is recuperating from a knee surgery which will keep her out of action for the next four months.

PORTUGAL

The earth moved, says Becks

DAVID Beckham's explanation as to why he missed the spot kick in the penalty shootout against Portugal at Euro 2004: something dodgy about the ground. After missing his shot by a wide mile, he gestured to the referee and later insisted that there was something wrong with the turf. (In case you're not keeping up, it was the match that saw England's exit.)

UEFA has ignored his complaints, saying that the Portuguese player Rui Costa also missed, but did not lodge a complaint.

But Beckham's ex-Manchester United teammate Ruud Van Nistelrooy also agreed that there was something not quite right with the turf, saying that there was some loose grass at the spot. But he didn't flub his spot kick.

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