

Make nation relevant to the young

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THERE was, umm, a wedding and also a reunion of sorts for two estranged lovers. Both events were televised live. We need not mention names here, but we know who they are.

TV stations obviously have progressed to a point where they compete for ratings but the content, in my opinion, has decidedly gone the other way.

Welcome to reality TV Malaysian-style, where the famous dictate our daily agenda.

The celebrity-obsessed culture is a manifestation of something greater — while people are not stupid, they have nevertheless become less interested in what's important; instead, they are keener on things that would distract from knowing what is important.

This is not uniquely a Malaysian phenomenon. It is everywhere. This is not an indictment against those who see little use in being informed of the "more important" things in life. After a hard day's work, we need to vegetate and tune out, sometimes.

This is expected when we have less worry or strife. Without challenges or a common cause, we would just be a group of people with disparate interests. Our common interest will be dictated by the lowest common denominator of who is sleeping with whom.

Now, it is possible to watch TV for days on end without knowing what's going on in the country. The abundance of choice on TV is great. Whether it is good or bad is the question.

We have news junkies grab-



In their own way, young Malaysians should be given the opportunity to show that they care.

bing at anything that comes their way, and those who do not give two hoots about events outside their comfort zones.

But society needs to bridge this gap. Obviously, those tuning out of news will not help the governing process, since governance is rooted in information dissemination or, simply put, how to get the message across to you and me.

TV came and induced passivity as far as information-gathering is concerned — one just sits and watches.

But TV has also evolved and is subscribing to the winning formula that people would like to know about other people. And, some would like others to know about them, too.

Newspapers, which for so long have been the dominant force in news dissemination, face trying times unless they re-invent themselves. The message is supreme but not the medium.

Furthermore, newspapers and conventional TV are being challenged by the all-inclusive Internet, entertainment-led

journalism and gossip-churning programmes.

An unscientific survey found that most local college students do not read newspapers or watch TV news. A majority rarely watch TV programmes, except sports and music. They browse the web for trends, fashion, music, etc.

They represent the lost generation, as far as the news audience is concerned.

They are the ones shunning the news and whose interest in current affairs is almost nil, except about splitting celebri-

ty couples.

It is often said that parents and the older generation become irrelevant for children as soon as they become teenagers. Parents merely become ATMs. Yet, we must be relevant, if only for the children's sake.

Similarly, as a nation, we must make the young to want to have an interest in the country. Find new voices and medium for this lost generation and make the country relevant to the young and vice-versa.

As we approach the 50-year

mark of nationhood, our youth must have something beyond the goings-on of celebrities, of Cinderella weddings and failed relationships.

It is natural for the young to be selfish, to be confined in their own existence and ignore the rest of the world.

But I believe officialdom must start to recognise the voices of this new generation, the ones who speak their lingo and champion their ideals — the filmmakers, musicians, writers, artistes, etc.

My faith in the future is restored by the energy and commitment that I see in young people. Our success as a nation has given them the confidence to do things that many generations before could not even begin to consider.

This is a young nation in more ways than one, and we must look at ways to communicate with them.

Their priorities and needs are different, and some of the values of yesterday may not fly with them.

It is nevertheless the responsibility of the elders to make sure the young care. They must be given the opportunities to express their ideas and thoughts.

Without such opportunities, our young will become weak, or just be interested in triviali-