

Tapping into the minds of future leaders

CHILDREN need greater interaction and exposure to other ethnic groups from a young age to inculcate a more tolerant way of thinking.

These future leaders require an appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

So says Zarina Nalla, policy and project development consultant with the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, at a recent forum entitled Nurturing the Minds of Future Leaders on UCSI University Kuala Lumpur campus.

Themed multiculturalism, freedom and intellectualism, the forum highlighted the way to better prepare today's youths to take on the challenges of tomorrow as the nation's leaders.

"(A child) needs to live the experience, and she won't have the understanding if she is in her comfort zone all the time," says Zarina. "You need to see and hear the others. We are all part of one society."

Malaysian children are often separated by ethnicity during primary school, making it difficult for them to overcome stereotypes. Likewise, Zarina feels that Malaysian youths are often exposed to ethnic stereotypes and power plays from a young age,

which leads them to a similar mindset as adults.

But Zarina says: "The concept of equal citizenship can be taught to a seven-year-old."

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs director Wan Mohamed Firdaus Wan Mohamed Fuad, one of the forum panellists, feels that the problem with Malaysian society today is its lack of encouragement for natural born leaders to assume leadership roles.

He says those who are smart and would make the best leaders are encouraged to read Medicine or Law instead of Politics.

Wan Mohamed Firdaus says youth also lack the freedom to make their own decisions regarding their future and restrain from challenging family pressure to enter into a specific field.

He adds youth need the ability to make these decisions from young to prepare them for the more difficult ones in the future, which will normally fall on the shoulders of leaders.

Another panellist, Perdana Leadership Foundation general manager Zarina Abu Bakar, was of the opinion that today's young

people need to be more politically engaged in order to become better leaders.

"Responsible leadership starts from being responsible citizens," she says. "To become leaders of the future we have to start by being aware of current concerns."

She also stresses that youth need to develop their knowledge base in order to achieve Vision 2020 — Malaysia's goal to create a fully-developed economy and unified society within the next decade.

The forum was held in conjunction with the Perdana Leadership Foundation essay writing competition, Malaysia in a Globalised World, which is open to locals between the ages of 18 and 25 to help develop awareness of nation-building in today's youths. Established in 2003 to support Malaysia's future development, the Perdana Leadership Foundation aims to provide youth insight into the contributions of the nation's leaders by showcasing the history and work of previous prime ministers.

For details on the contest, which closes on Sept 30, visit www.PerdanaEssayCompetition.com.my