

COMMENT

Curb hate for the sake of our children

ROBBING THE YOUNG: Extremism has denied many their right to education

EVERYWHERE throughout the country, especially at the beginning of the school year, parents and guardians caringly send children, especially those in their early years, to school. Some students go by themselves — by bus, trishaw, private car, taxi, train or boat — or they would ride bicycles or motorcycles. Teachers, too, use all means of transport to get to school.

"I touch the future — I teach," is a quote by Christa McAuliffe, a New Hampshire high school teacher selected from among 11,000 applicants as the representative of a

"teacher in space" programme. She would have been the first teacher in space. Unfortunately, she died when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded in 1986. The message is clear: educational institutions are about creating educational opportunities for all, and to touch the future and lead lives well in different ways.

Notwithstanding its idealistic mission, education has been under attack.



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The Global Terrorism Database has shown various kinds of attacks on schools. From 2009 to 2013, there were 10,000 attacks on schools, colleges and universities, with incidents recorded in more than 70 countries, with Pakistan, Nigeria, Colombia, Somalia and Syria registering the highest number of attacks.

The Education Under Attack Report reveals the extent to which education has been subjected to violence, with attacks meant to massacre and intimidate



A steamroller **destroying weapons** seized in search operations in Karachi, Pakistan, following an attack on a school in Peshawar last month. **Extremism feeds on itself** and creates a vicious cycle. AFP pic

communities or disrupt classes.

Diya Nijhowne, director of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, said teachers, staff and students "...are bombed, burned, shot, threatened and abducted precisely because of their connection to education".

Attackers oppose Western education, education for girls, religious schools from different sects and nanotechnology research, or they may just be political proxies in war tactics. Concerned leaders have called for the creation of "safe zones" around schools and for schools to not be used for military or political purposes.

Extremism has a way of creating a vicious cycle of more and deeper extremism. It also has a way of spreading across all domains, recruiting people from all social levels and age groups.

To some people, extremism may be regarded as a way of life. It may become ideological and create the exclusive "us", which is righteous, against the "others". Extremism

feeds on extremism, poverty, mis-education, wrong information, ignorance and personal ambitions. It feeds on itself.

Road bullies, political bullies and bullies in bureaucracies reveal varieties of extremism. There has always been bullying in schools. It is the responsibility of parents, school authorities, community and religious leaders, police and voluntary groups to ensure that bullies do not continue bullying, and victims are counselled to become strong and not develop into extremist personalities — and become bullies themselves.

There is the danger of copycat actions of the crimes of child abuse, child labour, kidnapping of pupils (as done by Boko Haram in Nigeria), attacks on schools (as done by the Taliban in Peshawar, Pakistan) and killing of children.

There is the danger of the export and import of subcultures foreign to Malaysian society. The personal tragedy and triumph of a person like Malala Yousafzai is a poignant

lesson for all.

So far, there have not been attacks on our schools. Nevertheless, there have been transgressions in mosques, churches, temples and other places of worship. We cannot allow a society to develop scripted hate messages in the collective psyche of the young.

What would happen if teachers in schools and those in hospitals discriminate? What happened, then, to the professional codes and oaths?

What if hate is developed to a crescendo and there are people, when they have the weapons, who would wait to kidnap or kill students from various types of schools?

Those who create the hate chain that leads to tragedies — may they or their loved ones suffer because of their extremism. Those who create disorder — may they or their heirs suffer the consequences of their actions. Repentance may be too late.

Good and evil exist everywhere among all peoples. It is not just the people who are labelled extremists or terrorists who may be evil. Even those who are not labelled as such may actually act as terrorists and extremists.

Society must be cognisant of labels, and see the intentions, articulations and actions of those who would be violent if they had the opportunity.

What nature of man and what nature of evil teachings create those who would harm innocent children and other people? Or, are other children not regarded as innocent and having rights because they belong to other cultures or are in different regions?

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