

Face our fears

Mental issues should be talked about

PSYCHOPATH, crazy, mental, insane, mad, deranged, lunatic — these are among the words we are familiar with whenever mental illness is broached. The condition has, for a long time, been associated with solitary confinement, painful treatments and public derision. At one point in history, a person with the condition was also thought to be possessed by evil spirits; faith healers and clerics would often be summoned to exorcise the “demons”. In Malaysia and many other countries, there is a social stigma associated with mental illness, shaped, most often, by superstitious beliefs and misconception. Clinical scientists and mental health advocates say the biggest challenge today is to dispel public perception of mental illness and convince people that it is a “treatable medical condition”. And, to achieve that, the matter “has to be talked about openly”, they say.

“When one talks about it, it is refreshing and inspirational, and brings a whole new light to the matter,” says a local celebrity who once suffered a bout of depression.

Malaysia has its fair share of mental issues — suicide, depression and psychopathic cases — often the result of loneliness, failure, loss of a loved one or neglect. Reportedly, mental illness is expected to be the second biggest health problem affecting Malaysians after heart disease next year, which, this Leader must point out, is only weeks away. Latest data from the National Health and Morbidity Survey says three in 10 adults aged 16 and above in Malaysia suffer from mental health disorder.

For too long we have swept the problems of mental illness under the carpet. This Leader hopes that 2020 would not be another year where the subject is set aside.

We must be firm in our acceptance of mental health problems, says Mental Health Promotion Advisory Council member Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye. He said until today, “mental” and “health” cannot be phrased in the same sentence. “We need to encourage dialogue on mental health issues. One should not be ashamed to seek help.”

The Health Ministry’s ongoing “Let’s Talk Malaysia” campaign is about raising awareness on the subject. There is so much material on mental illness, a delicate and “universally-dodged” subject, says a psychiatrist. He says mental illness must be brought “out of the shadow” and dealt with. For too long we have swept the problems of mental illness under the carpet. This Leader hopes that 2020 would not be another year where the subject is set aside. On Wednesday, the country’s first mental health handbook was launched, a joint effort by the Malaysian Psychiatric Association, Malaysian Mental Health Association and Pfizer Malaysia Sdn Bhd.

About time, too. The handbook is a guide to help Malaysians deal with mental health issues and information on how to reach out to someone with mental health problems. There is also a directory of mental health services in the country.

But what is more pressing is the need for a National Strategic Action Plan on Mental Health (2020-2025), which was supposed to be launched in September. A Health Ministry official, however, said it would only be implemented next year.

This Leader verily hopes so. It is time we start treating mental illness as a medical condition. Time to face our fears — when we do that “we gain strength, courage, and confidence”, so said Theodore Roosevelt, American statesman and the 26th United States president.

IMPROVING

MORE FLOOD VICTIMS RETURN HOME

Kelantan has 7,666 flood victims, but the number dropped to 861 in Terengganu

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THE flood situation in the east coast continued to show improvement yesterday, with the number of flood victims vastly reduced.

In Kelantan, there were 7,666 flood victims up to 7pm last night. They were from 3,024 families and were housed in 22 flood relief centres in two districts.

Data from the Welfare Department showed that only two districts, Pasir Mas and Tumpat, were still affected by floods.

Pasir Mas had 4,753 flood victims from 2,000 families in 15 relief centres.

Tumpat had 2,913 flood victims from 1,024 families in seven relief centres.

In Terengganu, the number of flood victims also dropped, with 861 victims recorded yesterday evening compared with 1,062 in the morning.

The victims were housed in six relief centres in Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus districts.

The Setiu relief centre was closed yesterday evening.

Official figures showed that up to 6pm yesterday, the number of flood victims in Kuala Nerus dropped to 609 people from 155 families in five relief centres, compared with 629 people from 163 families in the morning.

Kuala Terengganu had 252 flood victims from 55 families, a slight reduction from the 394 people from 100 families in the morning.

The authorities are keeping a close watch on the situation.

The National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) said a second wave of floods could occur on Dec 25 and 26 on a scale similar or larger than the first.

Nadma operations coordination department deputy director Rusli Ibrahim said the agency was concerned that the effects of the second wave of floods could be exacerbated by high tide in Kelantan.

Police advised the public, especially those in flooded areas, to be careful when fishing, Bernama reported.

Kelantan police chief Datuk Hasanuddin Hassan said al-



though most residents were aware of their surroundings, accidents could still occur.

He said outsiders should not fish in those areas as they would not be aware of the dangers.

Two drowning cases related to fishing have been recorded.

‘Govt has 5-year plan to boost flood preparedness’

PASIR MAS: The government is stepping up efforts to be better prepared for floods.

Defence Minister Mohamad Sabu said the police, army and Fire and Rescue Department would step up efforts to face any eventuality from the floods expected later this month.

“Based on a briefing given to me by the army recently, all preparations, including on logistics, are in place as we brace for another wave of floods that are expected in some parts of the country later this month.”

He said the government was committed to improving flood relief efforts.

“For example, the Water, Land

and Natural Resources Ministry is taking steps to mitigate floods caused by swollen rivers.

“The ministry is looking at this seriously and is undertaking a five-year plan to increase preparedness to face floods,” he said after presenting food donations to flood victims the SMKA Lati flood relief centre here yesterday.

A total of 405 flood victims from 133 families were taking shelters at the centre yesterday.

Earlier in his speech, Mohamad urged agencies involved in flood rescue operations in Terengganu and Kelantan to continue forging close cooperation with each other.

The National Disaster Management Agency forecasted that a

second wave of floods would likely strike Kelantan on Dec 25 and 26.

Its deputy director of operations coordination, Rusli Ibrahim, said the floods could be worse than the first wave as it could coincide with high tide in Kelantan.

“On another matter, Mohamad said the ministry would cooperate with the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) in its investigation into the tender process for fast interceptor crafts for the Navy.

“We have not received any information (from MACC) on the case.”

He visited flood victims at SMK Gual Perlok earlier. He was accompanied by Second Infantry

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