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Textbook errors: Prompt remedial action lacking

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I REFER to Ranjit Singh Malhi's letter "Rectify immediately factual errors, half-truths in history textbooks" regarding our Form One and Form Two history textbooks (NST, Jan 16).

I admire Ranjit's patience and resolve in trying to ensure that our history textbooks are objective and free of factual inaccuracies.

Objective and factual accuracy are important components of quality or reputable history textbooks.

Ranjit's letter prompted me to read the Form One history textbook's account of the downfall of the Malacca Sultanate.

It is definitely biased and factually inaccurate.

No mention is made of the betrayal of the Javanese leader of Malacca, Utimutiraja, the ineffective leadership of Sultan Mahmud and his son, Sultan Ahmad, and the desertion of the Javanese mercenaries who formed a large part of the Malacca army.

The textbook makes a great blunder by stating that some Indian merchants provided junks to the Portuguese in their attack on Malacca. There is no historical evidence at all to support this fact.

Portuguese records clearly state that some Chinese captains agreed to lend their junks to the Portuguese.

They did so due to their hatred of Sultan Mahmud who had earlier detained them and their men to help him attack Aru.

The Chinese captains managed to escape when Sultan Mahmud was preoccupied with fortifying the town of Malacca.

What is most disappointing, however, is the Ministry of Education's apparent lack of initiative and responsibility in rectifying the factual errors and half-truths which have been brought to its attention since January, 1997.

Worse still, the ministry has not responded to Ranjit's letter of Jan 16.

For the benefit of our students, the ministry should state publicly its official and specific stand on the factual errors and half-truths which Ranjit raised in his letter.

A general reply such as "Action is being taken to ascertain the accuracy of certain facts in the Form One and Form Two history textbooks," is definitely inadequate and outdated.

The present generation of educated and young Malaysians demand greater transparency, prompt remedial action and accountability from all government organisations.

Is the Education Ministry waiting for a public outcry or a ticking off from our action-oriented Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to propel it into action?