

History syllabus furthering political interests
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A few days ago, two senior academicians involved in the writing of history textbooks emerged from the shadows, saying that the history textbooks in the country are biased and littered with errors.

According to one of them, Dr Ranjit Singh Malhi, "secondary (school) textbooks have been used to promote political interests".

NONEThe other concerned author, Ng How Kuen, expressed the fear that making history a compulsory pass subject in Sijil Perlawanan Malaysia (SPM) would mean that students would have to subscribe to the official version of events or risk failing the entire examination.

It is said that history is written by the victors, but it is also true that we get the history we deserve. The disclosure that the teaching of history in schools has been skewed and has a political agenda - besides suffering from distortions and errors - is not the first time this issue has been brought to public attention. Earlier attempts to highlight the issue of what constitutes the true history of Malaysia and what is being passed off as officially-sanctioned history in the schooling and larger public system, such as the BTN courses, may have begun with a bang - but they have all ended with a whimper.

Forcefeeding the 'four diseases'

If we go by previous experience we can expect the following responses:

- * Bureaucratic foot-dragging and feigned ignorance on the issue;
- * Justification and cover-up of the existing history textbook and syllabus system and attempts to prevent any public discussion and reform;
- * Use of the mask of impartiality and superior knowledge to deflect criticism;
- * Attacks on the credibility of whistleblowers; and
- * Deafening silence from key stakeholders, including the academic community, political parties and professional organisations.

Why is the great majority of our Malaysian public not concerned about the version of history that is being propagated in the schools?

Why do the people close their eyes and their minds to the distorted history that is being taught to their children and grandchildren?

Do they not realise the consequences of the victory of a history that is radically different from the history that they themselves learnt when they were in school not so long ago? Was the history that they studied so wrong that it needs to be substantially changed in emphasis, content and scope?

Why are they silent on the development of a propagandistic and truncated history that is

increasingly infiltrated by the forces of Islamisation and crass nationalism, and where the four major diseases that afflict BN - delusion, amnesia, inertia and arrogance - are prominently evident and force-fed to the young minds of the country?

The answers are complex, but they essentially boil down to apathy and lack of concern, especially among the educated and elite groups of our society on these important issues that are crucial to our future as a rational and thinking society.

Underscoring this 'tidak apa' attitude is the dominant factor of self-interest and self-preservation.

Those involved with writing history text books and who are in the know about the deplorable and compromised standards of their peer group want to protect their lucrative side-employment.

Others, such as academicians or teachers of the subject in the schools, do not dare to speak out for fear of being labelled as 'anti-national', or as in the case of those in the public universities, for fear of running foul of the Universities and Universities Colleges Act, which will be selectively enforced on them should they write or speak publicly on issues that are out of line with the official position.

Academics BN sycophants

It is no coincidence that academicians and opinion writers who are regularly trotted out in the mainstream media are those who seek to justify or reinforce the current status quo. These sycophants have not only academic or intellectual immunity but they also enjoy perks akin to those enjoyed by the business cronies of the BN.

If there is any reaction from the academic community to the two whistleblowers, we can expect their comments to come from those who will toe and reinforce the official position and circumvent from the main issue of the Islamisation and politicisation of the Malaysian history school syllabus.

Dissenters, on the other hand, have to face the possibility of lost or delayed promotions and other forms of punishment not easily discernible to the public eye.

"Shut up, mind your own business" and cari makan (even though this may be through rent-seeking, queue-jumping, plagiarism and other unethical practices) have been the credo of the great majority of the professional elite in Malaysia. It is a culture that has served them well personally, but at what cost to the nation?

Malaysian history must be based on facts and the scrupulous depiction of historical reality. The writing of textbooks should not be left to those who regard it as a business or their political agenda and are prepared to bend the truth so that it meets with the vision of an Islamic and Umno-dominant Malaysia.

Unless we are prepared to fight for a scholarly, reliable and representative history, we will end up with a future - as well as a past - that reflects the dominant ethnic and religious culture and community, and marginalises or erases the contributions of other cultures and communities.

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