

Softening up students to Islam with History
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On Oct 23, Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announced that History will be made a must-pass subject for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia from 2013. This puts the subject on par with Bahasa Malaysia in its degree of importance.

The ministry will also introduce a revised SPM History curriculum in 2017, for in that year those who begin One in 2013 would have reached Form Five.

Fresh elements to be incorporated when the History syllabus begins its new cycle are 'patriotism', 'citizenship' and 'the constitution', which by extension implicate the so-called social contract.

Muhyiddin said the reason for the move to expand the History syllabus is so that patriotism can be instilled in Malaysian youths.

On Dec 16 - responding to objections raised by some quarters on his proposal - Muhyiddin(left) guaranteed that the government did not have any "ulterior motives" and reiterated that the government in its decision "only wants to introduce a history education to appreciate [patriotism] to help them [the Fifth Formers] become more patriotic".

Is this the real agenda of Umno and the Ministry of Education bureaucrats and their support group of academics or is this another Umno political lie?

In response, a middle-rank leader of the MCA (not the party president or deputy president or any of the other non-Malay BN party chiefs who have gone mute, dumb and deaf on this issue) has urged the Education Ministry to review the "imbalanced" account of the country's history in the school textbooks.

The present national narrative imparted to students - alleges the MCA - favours one race and one religious civilisation. According to Loh Seng Kok, the deputy chairman of the MCA publicity bureau, a review is necessary to rectify the shortcomings to "prevent ethnic disharmony in our nation".

Strong words, but from a level of leadership that carries little weight.

Furthering Ketuanan Melayu-Islam interests

Historian Dr Ranjit Singh Malhi, who has written some revision books, recently pointed out that not only do the secondary school history textbooks contain exaggerations and mistakes, but they have also "been used to promote political interests".

For example, Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy played a major role in the development of Kuala Lumpur as a commercial and tin-mining centre but the Form Two history textbook had only one sentence on Yap as "one of the persons responsible for developing Kuala Lumpur".

The Hindu civilisation of Lembah Bujang in Kedah - which can be traced back to the first half of the first millennium - is dismissed in just two paragraphs whereas the communist

contribution to helping Malaya gain Independence is omitted.

Besides the expurgation or omission of key events and developments in Malaysian history, in which non-Malay and other civilisational contributions have been prominent, there is a conscious and concerted attempt at propagandising Islamic elements into the curriculum.

A concerned parent complained in her letter to the editor that the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) writers assigned by the Education Ministry have not confined the textbook content to history alone. "Instead they have extended its boundaries seemingly to push a certain agenda. In the process, our history textbooks seem to have taken on a quest of its own - to win the hearts and minds of our children for that particular agenda," she wrote.

History as Islamic Studies

The introduction to the Form Four History textbook by the panel writers begins with "Syukur kepada Allah s.w.t. Tuhan Yang Maha Agung, selawat dan salam ke atas Rasul utusan yang mulia, para sahabat, dan mereka yang berada di jalan yang benar hingga ke hari kemudian kelak".

Students belonging to other faiths, who Muslims do not consider to be walking on "the true path to the Hereafter", will apparently have to re-orientate their mindset in order to do well in this subject.

The introduction to the Form Five textbook by the director-general of the Education Ministry starts on the note of "Syukur ke hadrat Allah s.w.t. kerana hasrat dan wawasan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia untuk menerbitkan semula buku teks KBSM dan KBSR telah terhasil".

The Education DG Abdul Rafie Mahat found it expedient to thank Allah for the success of his ministry's vision to republish the textbooks under the revamped syllabi.

Idewan bahasa dan pustaka building 250804n fact, two out of the four writers of the DBP writers selected to do the job for the Form Four syllabus are specialists in Islamic history. Their knowledge of Malaysian history and the history of non-Islamic civilisations, however, appear dismal.

Not only is an overwhelming proportion of the Form Four history textbook devoted to Islam (115 pages), conversely the other religions are barely given a passing mention; Hinduism gets half a page in Chapter 3 on the early civilisations of southeast Asia.

The concerned mother who wrote the letter, already widely disseminated online, has charged that History in Malaysian schools "seeks to influence the young minds of our children who come from various faiths, to follow the prophet [Muhammad] ... who is repeatedly praised throughout the chapters.

"Students are repeatedly exhorted throughout the book to emulate him as a role model in life", added the concerned parent. It is quite true what the letter writer observed, as flipping through the History textbook pages, one comes across the said exhortations which are indeed explicit and in those exact words (see endnote).

Do they write History in this way in other countries and do national textbooks elsewhere repeatedly exhort impressionable young minds to follow the behaviour of an individual who features overwhelmingly in their History curriculum?

Furthermore, this subject is a compulsory pass - fail History, fail SPM; no credit in History, no Grade I in SPM. Students are thus coerced to memorise the above brainwashing and internalise the indoctrination or else they will not get through their secondary education.

Non-Muslim parents are correct to worry about the five bulky chapters (out of the 10 chapters in the Form Four textbook) devoted to Islamic history and civilisation because they have been written "in a way that seems to be conditioning the minds of our youth to accept Syariah laws as the basis of our legal system in the future".

Schools becoming madrasahs

These concerns of worried parents have found serious academic backing.

Two academics from Australia's Flinders University in their paper 'The Islamisation of Malaysia: religious nationalism in the service of ethnonationalism' similarly noted that the upper secondary History syllabus "is a more traditional celebration of Malay nationalism, with barely a mention of Chinese or Indians".

Michael D. Barr and Anantha Raman Govindasamy, who co-authored the paper, believed "the overtly Islamic textbook... was not the result of a whim on the part of the authors, but part of a systemic [Islamisation] programme".

They pointed out that the term 'ummah' in its unqualified use in the context of Chapter 4 of the Form Four History textbook "carries the clear message that the Muslim perspective is being privileged in this history".

Barr and Anantha Raman added: "The imposition of an Islamic metanarrative at this point can be neither accidental nor incidental.

"It must be regarded as a deliberate attempt to impose a new form of identity on both the Muslim and non-Muslim children. This conclusion becomes even more pointed if we look beyond the teaching of history, and consider that the Islamisation process has permeated the entire schooling experience for those students who attend national schools".

Sane, progressive curriculum thrown to the winds

With the two authors' permission, CPI will be reproducing their paper in full tomorrow. Barr and Anantha Raman's Flinders University paper was first published in the Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol 64, No 3, in June 2010.

The paper unequivocally provides evidence that the Malay and Islamisation of the school syllabus has been taking place for some time.

Muhyiddin's recent announcement of this impending move by the Education Ministry portends the final nail in the coffin. A sane and progressive curriculum that meets the needs of a multi-racial and multi-religious society is thrown to the winds.

Meanwhile, the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) has similarly voiced its concerns over History becoming a compulsory subject and the potential impact this will have on students.

On Nov 27, NUTP revealed that the present passing rate for History is around 60 percent.

That the remaining 40 percent of the batches who sat the paper previously have failed it means more students than ever will fail the entire SPM when the Education Ministry decision takes effect in 2012.

Make no mistake. If Malaysians do not raise their voices now and stand up for their concerns, not only non-Malay but also Malay parents and students will reap the bitter harvest of this step backwards in our education system.

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