

**Don't concede in Interlok row, say groups**  
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A group of NGOs today urged the education ministry not to yield to demands by critics for the withdrawal of the novel *Interlok* from schools.

This was raised to the education ministry in a memorandum by the 13 NGOs today.

"It is an old book written by our local writer and there were no problems before... So why (the fuss) now? Is it because the elections are near?" asked Persatuan Penulis Nasional (Pena) president Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad after submitting the document in Putrajaya.

Mohamad Saleeh argued that there were elements of facts in the book because it was based on author Abdullah Hussain's life experience.

"He (the author) heard about these stories from another Indian scholar... It was not that he cooked any stories up," he said.

Meanwhile, the National Collaborative Parent-Teacher Association (PIBGN) president Mohammad Ali Hassan stressed that *Interlok* should be read by all Malaysians.

"(The novel) speaks about harmony, relationships between the three main races in this country... It is an educational book to be studied," he said.

**Don't take advantage of author**

Pena's vice-president Amiruddin Md Ali Hanafiah said that currently, the matter is being heavily politicised and this is detrimental for schoolchildren.

He said that there are students currently using the book and they will be confused due to the public debate over the book.

"If the education ministry withdraws the book, which talks about national unity, how will the teachers explain the decision to the students?" asked Amiruddin.

Meanwhile, Amiruddin also cautioned detractors to no "take advantage" of Abdullah who is currently ill.

"I hope no one is taking advantage of him. He is old, short of hearing and is not healthy. At his age (91), it's easy for him to get confused," said Amiruddin.

The groups' memorandum was received by education ministry deputy director-general Hay Yusoff.

Critics of *Interlok* argue that the book portrays the Indian community in bad light and its portrayal of the caste system was deemed offensive.

The matter is expected to be raised tomorrow during the Cabinet meeting.

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