

Dr M: Sensitivity mustn't deny truth in history
Malaysiakini.com
January 28, 2011

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad questioned whether it is wise to entertain sensitivity, at the expense of forgetting history.

In his latest blog posting on chedet.com, Mahathir said now we hear that in writing history, we need to be sensitive to all races.

"The question is how much sensitivity can we use to deny the truth in history. If it is too much then the history taught to our students will become fables and not history.

"There are a lot of things which are truth in history, which could be considered sensitive to Malays, Chinese, Tamils, Ibans, Kadazans and other races. If all is sensitive to the races and needed to be censored, then there would be no lessons which could be taught to our students," he said.

Mahathir said the by-product of learning history is that we become more concerned about others by avoiding repeating the same mistakes to the people and to the authorities.

He said in the past, we had an absolute monarchy system which destroyed the country, and the system has been replaced by a government for the people.

"Without experience and history, then correction to the administration of the country cannot be made," said Mahathir, who is the longest-serving prime minister

"Quoting a great American thinker, George Santayana, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'."

Although the former premier did not indicate whom or what he was referring to in the blog, it is believed to highlight the on-going controversy surrounding the Interlok book following protests from the Indian community.

Several Indian NGOs are against its use, following the use of a purported sensitive word in describing certain members of their community.

We learn from experience

Mahathir said we learn from experience and if the present climate is better than before, it is due to us not committing the same mistakes.

"We have learnt from experience and this experience is part of our history. I have read British, Japanese, Thai texts on their occupation, and I noticed there are a lot of important events which are not in them," he said.

Mahathir said history tells a story of what had happened to a country or race and not all of it is based on actual facts on what had happened.

Pointing out that different countries write their history differently, the former premier said

historians would place emphasis on their own country when writing it.

Using the Waterloo battle as an example, Mahathir said the British wrote that it was won by the Duke of Wellington while the Germans indicated Wellington almost lost at Waterloo, until the German troops led by Blucher arrived.

"We seldom read in Western texts that Spain was once occupied by Muslims for 800 years, or the heavy losses suffered by the British in Gallipoli, Turkey," he said, adding however that it does not mean that we can ignore such incidents as it is part of history.

Perkasa: consult Interlok author first

Meanwhile, Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali has urged the Education Ministry to get the agreement of national laureate Abdullah Hussein if it wants to go ahead in amending the Interlok text.

"Perkasa believes that for an author, honour is more important than royalties and that is why he was honoured as a national laureate. It is vital for the ministry to get the approval in writing from Abdullah before it decides to enter glossaries or footnotes or removing sensitive words.

"Perkasa is protesting and saddened by the ministry's move to make amendments. I would also like to warn the MIC that it should not blame the Malays if they did not vote for MIC candidates," he said.

Meanwhile, the president of the National Writers Association (Pena) president, Saleeh Rahmad, revealed that the decision to amend parts of Interlok was never discussed during the panel discussion on Jan 18.

"All agreed to accept the text and take into consideration the views aired by the MIC. The question of amending the novel does not arise. We are adamant that amendments should not be made," he said.

On Jan 18, the Education Ministry had held a dialogue chaired by Deputy Minister Dr Puad Zarkashi, who did not not reveal the details of the meeting.

Saleeh also questioned the opposition to the novel, as MIC wanted the text to be withdrawn as initially they had trouble with the word 'pariah' and later they raised up other sensitive words.

"We will hold meetings with other NGO to develop a new action plan," he said, without revealing when these would be held.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/154785>