

'Pariah' dropped from Interlok, says Muhyiddin
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The word 'pariah' has been dropped from the secondary school Malay literature textbook 'Interlok', Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said.

He said the word, which sparked a firestorm of protests from the Indian community, is among several references deemed offensive to Indians which have been omitted from the version used in schools.

Muhyiddin said the independent panel set up to study the novel, which included three Indian representatives, have unanimously agreed to replace the word pariah with "golongan yang sama" (the same group).

"With the agreement that was reached, the (education) ministry considers this issue solved," he said during question time in Parliament today.

Muhyiddin (right), who is also education minister, said the panel had gone through 106 amendment proposals to the school version of the novel, presented by the Indian representatives on the panel to the government.

The list however was whittled down to 19 issues that the panel deemed related to the sensitivities of the Indian community.

Of the 19 issues, three were considered solved, with the omission of the word 'pariah' from the novel, while the panel ruled that three other issues - the fact that Hindus revere the cow as a holy animal, the safety of Maniam's wife in India and the description of an Indian wedding as tedious - did not touch on Indian sensitivities.

Seven other issues were marked with errata for editing or omission, while six others raised were solved by changing the word 'tuhan' with 'dewa' and by dropping the phrase 'orang berkulit hitam' (blackened skinned people).

"The ministry will include a glossary to explain various phrases and concepts in the novel 'Interlok', to help students understand the text and context of the novel that presents a harmonious life in our country's multi-racial society," Muhyiddin said.

'What Indian representatives?'

M Kulasegaran (DAP-Ipoh Barat), however, stood to interject Muhyiddin's answer, accusing the latter of being an agent provocateur for even allowing the controversial book to be used as a school reference.

Launching into a nearly 20-minute tirade, Kulasegaran charged that Muhyiddin was giving in to "racist NGOs" such as Gapena in defending the use of 'Interlok' as a school textbook, while also denying that the three Indian representatives were part of the panel.

Kulasegaran's interjection sparked a prolonged war of words between backbenchers and opposition members, even testing the patience of the usually calm deputy speaker Ronald Kiandee - who for the first time hammered the mallet to call for order.

Later, at a press conference in the Parliament lobby, Kulasegaran (left) reiterated that it was not true that the three Indian representatives were even on the panel, maintaining the claim that they had quit the panel over its rejection of some 100 recommendations submitted on the book.

He said one of the Indian representatives who withdrew, Uthaya Sankar SB, again confirmed that they quit the panel during a forum on Interlok held at the KL and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall last night.

"What is shocking is that MIC agreed (with the panel). MIC is a double-headed snake, as it can tell the Tamil newspapers it is against the 'Interlok', but tell the government that it supports.

"It is astonishing and I am flabbergasted by the whole thing. It shows something is very wrong in this country," he said.

Kulasegaran stressed that the government needed to come up with a consistent education policy and not allow controversial books such as 'Interlok' to be used as school references.

"If they can use 'Interlok', then why not use 'Shit'? They banned that book, but what is the difference? The Deputy Prime Minister is trying to justify the little napoleons in his ministry who made the decision to use the book," he said, making a reference to the banned political satire book written by Shahnnon Ahmad.

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