

The dumbing of Malaysia's universities

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YOURSAY 'The strategy of Umno is to ensure this continues as intelligence among the population will end up challenging their rule.'

'When will UM be on par with its Singaporean twin?'

your sayAbasir: The watershed moment in Malaysia's higher education system was in 1974 with the passing of the UUCA (Universities and University Colleges Act) masterminded and executed by Dr Mahathir Mohamad as education minister.

That clearly marked the beginning of the rot which was accompanied by a series of rapid blows to academic bodies - the appointment of genuflecting, half-baked order-takers as vice-chancellors, the systematic erosion of academic thought and rigour replaced by sloganeering and political posturing to echo Umno, the throttling of university intakes by quotas to ensure that the merit-less gain places at the expense of those with potential, the deliberate elimination of English as a medium of teaching and learning, the displacement of academic discourse by 'official' religious programmes.

Having allowed semi-literates to run amok in universities for almost 40 years, the regime is now resorting to magic potions concocted in the labs of Pemandu to reverse the trend and turn the tide. It may succeed, perhaps in 40 years or so. Insyah' Allah.

Onyourtoes: Pandan MP Ramli Rafizi, I hope you are not trying to be politically correct here. The malaise of our universities goes far beyond lack of academic freedom. It also goes far beyond the stifling environment that our students are facing.

If faculty members have no brains, there is no academic freedom to exercise. If the students have no standard, they would not know whether the environment is stifling or otherwise.

We have to face reality; given Malaysia's stage of development, we have set up too many universities, made too many brainless people lecturers and professors and allowing too many unqualified students to study at the university level.

You know, the Philippines and Indonesia faced the problem of sub-standard university education years before what we face today. In a way, we are gravitating

toward third world standards instead of moving upwards toward first world standards.

Chandran Sukumaran: Malaysia is a failed nation because of the dilemma of you-know-who. Practicing meritocracy will produce smart people.

The strategy of Umno is to ensure this does not happen as intelligence among the population will end up challenging their rule. This was supported by Anwar Ibrahim when he was part of Umno.

Fighting for racial and religious supremacy is also another major factor that has caused this predicament and this will take many, many generations to rectify.

Foo: Rafizi, any objective and level-headed person can give you the answers. But the problem is not in the answers but do we have the political will to change?

We have discarded meritocracy for ages and welcome mediocrity and free lunch. So how are we ever to compete with the world when you don't even entertain any form of competition at all?

MCA Member: How can we attain high standards in education when the majority of students entering our public universities went in through the back door, that is via so-called internal matriculation examinations restricted almost practically to only one race?

Sabahan: During my time, students who were unable to obtain places at UM's medical faculty, could easily enter the medical faculty in Singapore and Hong Kong universities.

The faculty staff were really world-class and respected clinicians and researchers. Then came NEP (New Economic Policy), whereby the language of instruction in schools was changed to BM.

These professors and lecturers subsequently left in droves as they did not want their children to be educated in BM. From then on, the standards went down and is still falling.

Anonymous #40538199: Umno wants the Malays to feel inferior and insecure so that the party can continue to play the protector role to remain in power. So it is not in the party interest to provide world-class education to the Malays and the rakyat.

Franco: Rafizi, there is no need to go to NUS to find out how it maintains its standard. Some of us can elaborate it here why there is such a gap:

- 1) Merit-based education starting from primary school.
- 2) Standard of passing should be always maintained - A means 90 percent and above, not 80 percent for some or 40 percent for others.
- 3) Only the best should be allowed entry into universities, not anyone who qualifies because of his/her ethnicity.
- 4) Comprehensive overall education system - a total revamp is required.
- 5) There should be a clear and concise path to the future, be it academic or vocational.
- 6) Vocational should not be for dropouts only but should be a choice and there should be a stringent identification system in place.
- 7) There should be no involvement of politics in the Education Ministry. Only the best has to be appointed and the director-general/state directors/headmasters/teachers should be chosen based on merit and not race or religion.
- 8) All forms of education has to be made available, kebangsaan, vernacular and even English school - the choice should be with the parents where they wish their children to be enrolled.
- 9) This will be the basis of the basic education which in turn produce better students who will then qualify on merit into public universities. Those who don't make it have to decide on other avenues (private) for education.

Then and only then maybe the gap could be reduced.

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