

Why some books banned in BM but not in English?

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MP SPEAKS According to the Home Ministry's website, there are a total of 1,532 banned publications, with the most recent publication to face the government's wrath being, inexplicably, a comic entitled Ultraman: The Ultra Power.

While the very act of banning books cannot possibly be justified, there is another trend that makes even less sense.

There appears to be certain books that are banned only in the Malay language, while there are no restrictions whatsoever on their English versions.

One such example is the seminal book, *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, which is available for sale at many bookstores in Malaysia. However, its Malay translation, *Asal-usul Spesies*, is listed as a banned book under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1982.

Charles Darwin's famous book is not the only publication to suffer such a fate. One other example is Karen Armstrong's *Islam: A Short History*, which is freely available at bookstores and university libraries in Malaysia, while *Sepintas Sejarah Islam*, the Malay translation, is also listed as a banned book.

In the last Parliamentary session, I submitted a question on *The Origin of Species*, enquiring why the Malay translation of the book is banned while the English version is allowed.

According to the written reply by the home minister, the book is banned because it "endangers public harmony".

Explaining further, the minister also states that the "translated book depicts a view of the origin and creation of species that goes against Islamic teachings and is in contravention of the Islamic Materials Censorship Guidelines as well as the beliefs of the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah..."

Meanwhile, the English version is allowed because the Home Ministry has "not received any complaints regarding the existence of any infringements of Islamic aspects..." according to the very same guidelines by Jakim.

The explanation by the home minister not only makes absolutely no sense, it is also a veritable insult to the intelligence of Malaysians.

How can the same book be considered a public danger and against Islamic teachings in one

language, but perfectly acceptable in another?

Worse, is the home minister also effectively telling Malaysians that knowledge is reserved only for those who are English-literate?

Malay-speakers not mature enough?

Is a Malaysian who can only speak and read in Malay considered not mature enough to make informed decisions?

As most people who fall into the latter category are Malays, the question then arises whether there is a deliberate policy to keep Malays ignorant.

Not only is such discrimination abominable, it is also ineffective because books and knowledge can be easily accessed and obtained on the Internet.

Therefore, I urge the home minister to lift restrictions on the sale and distribution of all publications, and to immediately end the intellectual persecution of Malaysians.

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