

Not afraid of history, just of policymakers
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The deputy prime minister, who is also the education minister, has recently defended his decision to make history a compulsory paper to pass for SPM students.

He is quoted saying, "Why are we afraid of our history? What is history is history, and we cannot concoct something that is not history."

In every sense of the word, he is right in saying, if our parents came from Kerala, India, the fact cannot be changed; instead, we have to face the truth that we have our roots in India.

And, if Hang Tuah and his friends were truly the admirals sent by the Emperor of China to protect Hang Li Po, this has to be taught as another historical fact. There is no reason why anyone should be afraid of history.

Many of us also know that the Malacca Sultanate started with Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Palembang, around the fifteenth century.

And history also has to be "all-inclusive" by saying the earlier settlers in the north western region of the Peninsula were from mainland China, who had arrived in this part of the world over 500 years ago.

History has its value, if it is given the proper position. The root cause for the poor performance of students in the history paper can be tackled, without having to make the history paper a compulsory subject, where the SPM student has to pass before they are issued the SPM Certificate.

Teachers, for example, play a very important role. They make the subject interesting and "come alive". In fact, there are a lot of beautiful life's lessons that can be learnt from history class. Some good examples are how arrogant leaders in past civilisations have fallen because they had failed to consult the people or had consulted the wrong people around them.

While it may be true that the decision was not being politically motivated, as defended by the DPM, I see that it is another decision that will eventually impact the quality of our education. Turning the history paper into a compulsory paper will force students to merely study for the sake of the examinations.

As it is, the Malaysian education system is already lagging behind that of First World countries because of its emphasis on examination-based assessments, instead of research-based assessments that require students to learn to be independent.

Our education system that has gone through several rounds of revamp since the seventies has also not helped our country to leap forward. Instead of being among the top universities in the region, our public universities are now struggling to achieve good rating among other institutions in the world.

I dread to think that many of our students will be spending hours of their study time to commit irrelevant dates from the history class into memory just in order to pass the paper. This would be done at the expense of the other more relevant subjects that become

prerequisite for entry requirements into a career-focused degree programme.

While we are trying to produce good and young independent thinkers, I am afraid the decision by the Ministry of Education is not bringing us forward, but one step backward. I would be least inclined to politicise this issue, because as a parent, I believe education should best be left to the highly-qualified educationists in the country.

I trust that, with this, the Ministry will yet again revisit its decision and consult the academics before making a policy decision.

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