

Muhyiddin teaches a History lesson
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The Form 4 History textbook published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) is written by Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman, Mohd Yusof Ibrahim, Muhammad Bukhari Ahmad and Rosnanaini Sulaiman.

NONEThe Form 5 textbook is written by Ramlah Adam, Shakila Parween Yacob, Abdul Hakim Samuri and Muslimin Fadzil.

The editors are Siti Masni Kopin, Zalehar Raub and Abdul Ghani Abu. The DBP oversight panel comprises Nordin Hussin, Prof Qasim Ahmad, Associate Prof Abd Rahim Abd Rashid, Dr Baharudin Ahmad, Shakila Parween Yacob, Rozeman Abu Hassan, Nor Zamani Abd Hamid, Fuzie Yahya, Mohd Fauzi Ali, Esah Jantan, Akashah Ismail, Associate Prof Aini Hassan, Haznah Hamzah, Wan Nik Muda and Baiha Haron.

Top Education Ministry officials involved in curriculum development are: Division director Julaihi Bujang, head of history unit for curriculum development (Nor Zamani Abd Hamid), department head of textbook division (Jame Alip), and director of educational planning and research division (Zahri Aziz).

The ministry's highest-ranking administrators are Rosli Mohamed, Ghafar Mahmud, Badarudin Abd Rahaman, Noor Rezan Bapoo Hashim, Khair Mohamad Yusof and Asariah Mior Shahrudin.

The state education directors are Shahidan Abd Rahman, Hussain Awang, Mohammad Zaki Mohd Yusof, Isa Abu, Mansor Lat, Ibrahim Mohamad, Abdullah Mohammad, Abdul Aziz Abdul Latiff, Mohd Radzi Abd Jabar, Muhiddin Yusin, Mortadza Hj Alop, Sulaiman Wak, Ariffin Embong, Mohd Adenan Deraman and Khairil Awang. Chief executive of the Examination Council is Omar Abu Bakar.

Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has announced that students sitting SPM must pass History. This is to take effect in 2013, which means that by 2012, all students in Form 4 must study the subject so that they can sit the exam the following year.

Deputy Education Minister Mohd Puad Zarkashi (who has been guest-of-honour at several Perkasa events) said that the History syllabus will incorporate elements of 'patriotism', in addition to 'citizenship' and 'the constitution'.

Therefore 16- and 17-year-olds, even those in the Science stream, will soon be taught in class how to love the country and be a model Malaysian, and about what is written in Malaysia's birth certificate e.g. Article 3 (Islam as religion of the federation), Article 153 (special position of the Malay), etc.

In other words, learning all these in the History subject will help students understand what Malaysia and by extension, what a Malaysian (First) is.

Textbook content

The Form 4 textbook has on its cover the Batu Bersurat Terengganu, a stone tablet that is the oldest inscription marking the arrival of Islam on our shores. Islam is the "base that has

the most intimate relationship with the history and evolution of this land ...," said Chandra Muzaffar, chair of 1Malaysia Foundation, in his Sept 8 interview with the New Straits Times.

Of the Form 4 History textbook's 10 chapters; five are exclusively on Islam (the emergence of Islamic civilisation and its spread in Mecca, the Islamic government in Madinah, the formation of Islamic governments and their contribution, Islam in South-East Asia, and the renewal and influence of Islam in Malaysia before the arrival of the Westerners).

Comparatively Lembah Bujang in Kedah is given short shrift and has altogether only two paragraphs devoted to it. Our Malaysian textbook fails to tell students that Lembah Bujang was built 1,200 years before Malacca, and was the cradle of the golden Hindu era in South-East Asia. Instead, the textbook states insouciantly: "Candi yang terdapat di Lembah Bujang bersaiz kecil". (The shrines found in Lembah Bujang were small in size.)

Meanwhile, Form 5 History starts with nationalism during the pre-war period and moves on through the development of Malaya, Malaysia and 'Bangsa Malaysia' (this term is used in two chapter titles).

Chapter 5 of the Form 5 DBP textbook discusses Merdeka, which it calls 'Perjanjian Tanah Melayu 1957'.

Chapter 8 touches on the National Culture Policy. The three main principles of this policy are (1) the culture of the original rakyat of the Malay region/archipelago will be the foundation of national culture, (2) elements of other cultures that are suitable and proper may be accepted, (3) Islam is the most important element of national culture.

But as we know, certain elements of other cultures were deemed improper some years ago, and that's why there was the ban on lion dance, Chinese costume drama serials over RTM, firecrackers, etc. Some schools today, it seems, would like to ban pork sausages.

Exam questions

Half of the Form 4 History textbook is on Islam. Thus Muslim students have a competitive edge in the exam as they've had wider exposure to the topics. Furthermore, Muslim students are allowed the option of taking up to four Islamic subjects in SPM: (1) Pendidikan Islam, (2) Pendidikan Syariah Islamiah, (3) Pendidikan Al-Quran dan As-Sunnah, (4) Tasawwur Islam - giving Muslim top scorers a 4As headstart.

NONE On the other hand, with History being made a must-pass subject, students flunking History will fail the entire SPM. Students without a credit in History might not be able to obtain Grade 1 even though they do well in their other subjects.

Paper 1 of SPM History is an objective test. In last year's SPM exam, Question 1 was: 'In his writing 'Muqaddimah', Ibn Khaldun stresses on the civilised aspect of urban life. What is this aspect?'

Other questions (condensed translation): What was the reason for the al-Basus 40-year war between the descendants of Bakar and the descendents of Taghlib during Zaman Jahiliah in Arabia?; What was the contribution of al-Arqam bin Abu Arqam in helping the spread of Islam?; What was the effect of the Quraisy of Mecca breaching the Hudaibiyah treaty and supporting Bani Bakar in their war against Bani Khuza'ah?; Select the relevant statement with regard to the Mawali, the first non-Arabs to embrace Islam; What was the contribution of the Caliph Uthman bin Affan to the defence system of Madinah's Islamic state?; What is

the lasting legacy of the Turkish Ottoman empire in the field of arts?; Based on these three theories - Islam from Arabia, Islam from India, Islam from China - what similarity is there with regard to the spread of Islam?; Why was the institution of 'baitulmal' introduced by the Malaccan Malay sultanate?

The questions collated above make up nearly a quarter of the total 40 multiple-choice questions in the 2009 SPM History exam.

Unlike Lim Guan Eng who styles himself Caliph Umar Abdul Aziz, I daresay Chua Soi Lek will not be able to ace the SPM paper as he is "ignorant" of Islamic (now Malaysian curriculum) history.

On the other hand, Lim famously rebuked the MCA president for his 'ignorance', urging "Dr Chua should educate himself in history that the civilisation of Islam was filled not just with global empires, but also with glory in art, learning, algebra and astronomy," the Malaysian Insider once reported.

Muhyiddin's payback

Echoing a similar sentiment was Utusan Malaysia's front page headline on Oct 29 that complained 'Many are ignorant of history'. The paper supports the government decision to make History a core subject and compulsory pass so that Malaysians will not be like 'pendatang' who have no inkling of the country's roots (a lack of awareness unbecoming of a Malaysian First-er).

You must be wondering what led the government to such an unprecedented and groundbreaking decision as to make History the most important subject of all.

You will remember that Muhyiddin was browbeaten by Lim Kit Siang on the issue of Malaysian identity. Similarly Karpal Singh tried to corner Najib Abdul Razak into replying in Parliament whether he was Malaysian First or Malay First. DAP MPs like Tony Pua and others eagerly declared that they were Malaysian First, with Lim Guan Eng going as far as to chastise Umno's "racist ideology of Malays first and Malaysians second".

DAP, needless to say, are Chinese last.

I've several times called on Kit Siang and his party ideologues to spell out clearly what their Malaysian First is. Thus far, I've not heard any credible explanation from them, which led me to conclude the slogan is not premised on any legitimate moorings.

How to define Malaysia and Malaysians? If DAP is unclear on the concept, Muhyiddin is quite willing to take up the challenge based on sound, academic arguments. After all, he runs the Education Ministry, and he has the means at his disposal to do so.

Other related state agencies too are able to educate the public on what elements have historically formed the Malaysian (First) identity, for example, BTN which is responsible for shaping attitudes, and RTM under the Information Ministry. If you'll look at the chart of RTM Who's Who (as at April 2010), there appears to be only one staff of Chinese ethnicity among RTM's top 40 administrators; he is Rashid Woon Abdullah, editor of Mandarin news.

NONE In my critique of the Malaysian First campaign, I warned that DAP could not possibly hope to win in any game of one-firstmanship. It was really quite easy to foresee the outcome of DAP's folly given who dominates, if not totally control, the apparatus of state.

It's also possible that had not DAP been 'terlalu galak menjolok sarang tebuan' (incessantly baiting Muhyiddin and Umno), it may not have crossed the mind of our Education Minister that all young Malaysians must be compelled to understand their country better through its history, and from there have a better comprehension of what makes a Malaysian (First-er).

I could be wrong but the Form 4 History syllabus does appear to have been created without much (if any) input from the minority communities. The Malaysian bureaucracy is clearly saturated with Malay-Muslims under a 'system' encoded with Ketuanan Melayu-Islam DNA.

Mind you, Islamic supremism is not necessarily a gene pool monopolised solely by Umno. Lim Guan Eng wears the face (or at least the mask) of Ketuanan Islam as well.

From his track record of bending over backwards to woo the Malay electorate, it's more likely that if tasting power in Putrajaya, Lim will increase the Form 4 History textbook's current five chapters on Islam to seven. Indeed with DAP trying to out-Islamise PAS, I wouldn't be surprised if Lim were to suggest that (since we have Islamic banking), why not the schools introduce Islamic Math.

Read also the writer's article in April 'Muhyiddin and the ethnic swing back' discussing the Kit Siang challenge.

HELEN ANG used to be a journalist. In future, she would like to be a practising cartoonist. But for the present, she is in the NGO circles and settling down to more serious writing and reading of social issues.

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