



# Teach the correct history of the nation

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WE LEARN during our history lessons in school how Malacca became an entrepot, an eastern emporium, in the 15th century, why Penang and Singapore were founded by the British and we also learn why the entity known to the colonial power as British Malaya was divided into the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the un-Federated Malay States.

But young Malaysians are hardly clear as to why Malaysia was formed. For how long was the idea considered before it was first made public in May 1961? Why were leaders of Sabah (known as British North Borneo then) and Sarawak opposed to it? What made them change their mind?

The patronising ways of those from Kuala Lumpur when they made a goodwill tour of the two states in July 1961 did not endear them to some communities in the two British colonies and special efforts had to be made later to woo them and to win them

over to the idea of Malaysia. These stories must be told in our school textbooks.

Also much more need to be included in the school textbooks of the history of the country from the time the British returned after the Japanese occupation – the political and constitutional changes – to the time when the Union Jack was lowered for the last time on Aug 31, 1957.

What happened centuries earlier are already standard history of the country. Maybe some adjustments could be made to it as researchers uncover new facts which shed more light to what is already known. Perhaps what is lacking is a little more focus on how and why the Chinese and the Indians arrived to these shores long before they were recruited and shipped here as labourers.

But what happened after 1945 – wars and all – must be better told in the school history books so that students appreciate and understand that

it was through sheer hard work, sacrifices, many difficult negotiations and many tense moments that resulted in the birth of Malaysia. Together we did it, it was a joint effort and it must be celebrated.

What better way to promote Malaysia and Malaysian nationalism among the young citizens than through their history lessons in school where they are made aware that this nation was forged by a common will, a strong determination to persevere despite the odds and a

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common suffering.

An effort, therefore, must be made to write a history that can do that. Thus, the history textbooks for schools should no longer be left to individual authors to decide what to include or emphasise and what to be left out. They must be supervised by a multi-racial panel of experts which must include educationists and historians.

Of course, there is no way the authorities can control those who want to write their versions of the history of the country or of a particular episode, and they should not, but only the books approved by the special panel should be used as school textbooks or as reference books placed in school libraries.

In a sense, the panel will also have to do what newspaper editors do everyday – select – as it cannot possibly include everything that has happened into the textbooks.

Thus, it will have to decide, for instance, whether the discussions leading to the formulation of the post-war Chinese policy that led to the establishment of the Malayan Union on April Fool's Day 1946 be included in the textbooks. Among other things the discussions in London and New Delhi centred on citizenship rights and participation in the civil service.

The aim initially was to induce the Chinese community, especially those in the Kuomintang and the communist fighters and other

fighters belonging to Chinese secret societies in the resistance movement, to cooperate with the British invasion forces.

The communists were unexcited by the proposed Malayan Union. The proposal was generous enough to the Chinese, but the country would become a full-fledged British colony. On being informed about it, they "stole the thunder" by making known their own plan of "establishing a democratic government in Malaya with an electorate drawn from the races of each state and the anti-Japanese army".

The fact that the Malays protested against the Malayan Union when it was announced is much highlighted in the school textbooks. Especially highlighted is that most of the Malay organisations that participated in the protest later came together to form United Malays National Organisation or Umno.

Not very well highlighted are those organisations which refused to be part of Umno, especially the radical and leftist inclined groups such as the Malay Nationalist Party, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API) and Lembaga Kesatuan Melayu.

A few months after the Malayan Union was inaugurated, the British colonial authorities, the Malay rulers and representatives of Umno met to discuss an alternative to Malaya as a colony.

Shortly after the Federation of Malaya was announced,

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