

# Malaysia: Syed Husin: History books need open minds, not emotional politicians

Monday 22 March 2021, by [VENGADESAN Martin](#) (Date first published: 28 February 2021).

**The most recently revised version of the Form Four history textbook does a better job of balancing different historical narratives than its previous editions, said former PKR deputy president and Universiti Malaya professor Syed Husin Ali.**

“Some people are questioning the mention of Communists in the book. Well, it is one thing to talk about the terror they caused through their violent struggle and this cannot be denied. In fact, there is a whole chapter in the book about the Communist Emergency from 1948 to 1960.”

“But at the same time, the fact has to be accepted that there was a role played by the Communist to fight the Japanese during World War II and that is covered by one page. Even in achieving independence, they were one factor, without their military action, the British might not have given us independence so fast.

“The Communist Party of Malaya had a Communist government in mind, but to get that, first they also needed independence,” Syed Husin told *Malaysiakini*.

He added that a balanced understanding of history needed open minds and less emotional remarks from politicians who do not necessarily know what they are talking about.

Recently, Umno Youth Chief Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki had incorrectly [criticised](#) Pakatan Harapan over two pages in the history textbook on the role played by radical Malay leftist leaders in fighting for independence and the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army’s (MPAJA) battle against the Japanese occupation.

“First of all, the official history was very often about individuals and groups in the elite strata of society. In the past, it was presented as if those who fought for Merdeka were only Tunku Abdul Rahman, Umno and the alliance.

“That was unfair and lopsided as there was not much mention of the common man and the Malay leftist leaders in the struggle,” said Syed Husin.

“We need to revisit and review the role of the CPM in the independence struggle.

“We should also not brand the radical nationalist political parties like Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya, Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API) and Angkatan Wanita Seda (AWAS) as pro-communists.

“They all played a role and recently they have been included. I believe that now they have tried to show some kind of balanced view and this is reflected in the textbook.”

He said that school history books were showing some improvement but still could be better.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) on Feb 25 had confirmed that the Form Four history textbook had gone through a strict quality control process covering various processes before being certified in April 2018.

It was also vetted by a seven-member multi-racial panel of experts comprising Associate Prof Shamrahayu Aziz (IIUM); Prof Kamaruzaman Yusoff (UTM); Prof Emeritus Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali (UM), Ho Hui Ling (UM); Prof Sivamurugan Pandian (USM); Associate Prof Rohani Abd Ghani (UKM) and Associate Prof Bilcher Bala (UMS).

### **Legal action**

Ever since Asyraf brought up the issue, it has threatened to boil over.

Harapan's former education minister Maszlee Malik has already instructed his lawyer to send a letter of demand to Asyraf over the matter.

The Simpang Renggam MP asked Asyraf to make an open apology and pay compensation for alleged [defamation](#) regarding the issue.

Maszlee explained that the process of writing the textbook had already started in 2017 and the education minister at that time, Mahdzir Khalid, was from Asyraf's own party, Umno.

Asyraf has refused to apologise saying that his allegation was based on the approval of the Curriculum and Assessment Standard Document (DSKP) on April 24, 2018, and that it then needed to get cabinet approval to enable the printing process.

To back this up, he claimed that on April 7, the BN government had dissolved Parliament and the BN cabinet was no longer governing although in actual fact BN stayed on as a caretaker cabinet until the polling day on May 9 of that year.

Meanwhile, former deputy education minister Teo Nie Ching said she would take legal action after it was alleged that she had been 'interfering' in changing the content of school history textbooks.

Yazid Othman, the deputy chairperson of the Coalition of NGOs for Rejecting Form Four History Textbooks (BST4) claimed in an online discussion that there was an '[unseen hand](#)' manipulating the contents of Form Four history textbooks including 'glorifying communists' as independence fighters.

Not naming Teo, he made reference to a Chinese female deputy minister of education.

---

### **Martin Vengadesan**

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

---

### **P.S.**

Malaysiakini

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/564630>