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# Education for nation-building

MY VIEW -  
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**I OFTEN** wonder why we still need to have the lyrics of *Negaraku* projected each time on the screen during official events. After more than 60 years of Merdeka I reckon that all Malaysians attending such official events are able to sing the national anthem by heart. I recall how it was for me at a tender age in school, where the classes were more heterogeneous than today.

But no matter, the anthem is our “love” song for the country. And it must be fully embraced like how “true lovers” would embrace.

There was no need for the National Anthem Act to govern our behaviours towards it. That it should be in Bahasa Melayu (before Bahasa Malaysia become fashionable) is also unquestionable. A love is a love regardless of the language. There’s no need for translation. You would belt it out heartily when the need arises.

It was only later that I came to know the actual meaning of the “love” song, which would make the heart grow fonder. By then my vocabulary and command of Bahasa Melayu had improved despite speaking it since birth, “tanah tumpahnya darahku” was literally the place where I spilt my blood!

Even the word “negara” was not clear to me then and I am sure it was the same for all my classmates, too. Obviously, the best way to grasp its meaning is to master the national language, like all citizens should, since the anthem is not just a song that can simply be mimed and forgotten.

It is called an “anthem” for a reason, which is to be lived by and a rallying call for national unity to protect the beloved country, come what may. Therefore, the nuances – that cannot be translated – are equally vital. They must be felt and experienced like all Malaysians should. Schools are, therefore, the best places for this – a Malaysian school that is, just like the one I attended throughout my schooling days.

The recent event, where the anthem was rendered in different languages, seems like a new phenomenon that underpinned several “sad” assumptions. Given the justification from the Ministry that it is learning about the anthem, it sounds fair enough.

However, there are allegations of it happening as recently as early 2014, when it was translated in textbooks for year five. By then, their command of the national language did not necessitate any translation, going by my early experience. So, something is gravely amiss.

In the worst case scenario, it could be done in many other ways creatively without having to sing it out loud in other languages in contradiction to what is stipulated in the National Anthem Act 1968, as noted by experts. They should have known this well if learning about the anthem is properly done. What is actually happening is at best baffling.

The student can write essays or debate about it, but the crux of the matter is that one cannot appreciate the full meaning, let alone the nuances, if their command of the original lyrics is poor.

For example, what would “Raja kita selamat bertakhta” entail when sung in other languages? “Raja” (the second principle in the Rukun Negara) in our context has a number of connotations that takes an entire history lesson to fathom.

Meaning to say, in order to fully appreciate the *Negaraku*, understanding its history too, among others, is imperative. There are no shortcuts to being truly loyal Malaysians.

There are many other similar questions, not just to ensure that the phenomenon is not repeated under whatever circumstances, but more importantly to make sure the *Negaraku* is an anthem that unites all with the “right” understanding for every citizen.

It is sad to admit this now after decades of celebrating our nationhood, but let us call a spade a spade!

In this context, one is tempted to link the larger negative incidences involving the Jalur Gemilang. Why so? Well, each time we sing the anthem, invariably the national flag will be there visually, or at least be projected on the screen.

The basics: design and character are plain to see. Likewise, the colours and what they stand for should be well-rehearsed by now.

Therefore, it is very difficult to buy the many excuses spewed when things go wrong, even reportedly at the 30th SEA Games in Manila.

To make matters worst, it seems that all they got away with are mere apologies and a few bows publicly. Even the last incident where the white stripes were coloured black, a follow-up on the issue remains unheard off until today. The impression it gives is that it’s okay to abuse sovereign symbols. The most, if at all, is a slap on the wrist.

Such “cultural” abuse and corruption is not high on our list for action, unlike the monetary ones, although the net effect could be worse.

In the final analysis, it points to a schooling system that has gone haywire as the bedrock of nation (negara?) building. We may have improved the PISA score by a few notches. But what has that got to do with nation-building? Is it education in the first place?

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