

Let's celebrate Nur Amalina's success

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Article

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IN the context of an "education revolution", the achievement of Nur Amalina Che Bakri in her Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination is no less "revolutionary".

This is even more so, given that there seems to be a drastic decline in the number of straight-A students in last year's SPM examination.

This simple girl from a school hitherto unknown Ulu Tiram school has broken not only the record of previous SPM performances by scoring 17AIs in one sitting, but more importantly shattered many mind-sets across the nation.

For a while at least, the national school system has been vindicated from the unhealthy scepticism that are unfairly heaped on them.

For the Bumiputera students, it shows that they, too, are capable of performing well, despite the constant harassment that is beginning to scar their minds.

For the bigots, it is a rude awakening to the fact that, ethnicity has nothing to do with stellar performance, and that cultural diversity (rather than monoculture) should be the norm for a learning environment.

Unlike the nerdy stereotypes, Nur Amalina excels outside the classrooms, despite being called *budak buku teks* by her schoolmates.



Nur Amalina: Scored a record 17A1s in SPM

Reportedly, the walls of her home are decorated with plaques and certificates as testimonies to her extra-curricular achievements.

Apparently, she was an exchange student in France for two months, and she speaks French fluently after that. Maybe she would have scored 18AIs, had French been offered in SPM.

Above all, what seems most impressive is the attitude and maturity she displayed when quoting Mahatma Gandhi: "The measure of success is not the result but the effort".

I guess not too many youngsters would care too much for someone such as Mahatma Gandhi, a towering personality clad only in loin-cloth.

Gandhi has little room in the make-believe world of glamour and glitters, never mind if it is devoid of substance and meaning.

Few would truly understand what Gandhi stood for when he said those profound words in defining the true meaning of success, which in today's term is no more than quick tangible results.

Incidentally, this week celebrates the 75th anniversary of Gandhi's "salt march" of 1930, another momentous "effort" that earned India its eventual independence from the British.

Not surprisingly Nur Amalina's success also created other spins. Some doubted whether the SPM has gone "soft" with inflated grades. But this cannot be so since there were 31 per cent fewer top scorers compared with 2003.

Others suggested that she's just "plain lucky" more than anything else, which sounded a little *kiasu*.

Still others without rhyme or reason castigated the local tertiary education institutions just because there were some suggestions that Nur Amalina should study in a renowned university abroad.

Those who are quick to criticise local universities may not realise that it was not so long ago that even Cambridge was a poor copy of Oxford.

Even Oxford came into being much later after some prestigious universities were established in continental Europe. All of them are now over a century old.

Lest we forget, last year two of our universities were ranked among the top 200 institutions of higher learning in the world, according to The UK-based Times Higher Education Supplement.

And one of them, Universiti Sains Malaysia, is just 35 years old, while the other, University of Malaya, is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

It takes some "effort" to be recognised, which going by the wisdom of Gandhi is a measure of success, though arguably more effort is required by all (except arm-chair critics) for greater success.

So, it is, therefore, not useful just to blabber something (usually under the cloak of pseudo-names) without knowing the larger context of history.

Anyway, coming back to Nur Amalina, if she truly wants to become a Prime Minister, she can take heart at the fact that the last two of our Prime Ministers had their education in a local university — then not even ranked among the world's best.

Whatever the case, when a school in Ulu Tiram can produce an all-time best, it says little about where one is educated without due recognition of the individual involved.

According to a Malay proverb, a good seedling, wherever it is scattered, will turn into an island. (*Benih yang baik, mana-mana dicampak sekalipun akan menjadi pulau jua*). Indeed, Nur Amalina is one such seedling. Otherwise how else can we explain her scoring 17AIs, combining an almost equal number of arts and pure science subjects.

She tutored herself in seven of the subjects and sought help from a tuition class for one subject.

This is perhaps the distinction she held when compared with others in the same league over the past years.

Finally, to Nur Amalina and the other top scorers, congratulations for the tremendous effort that has finally paid off.

For those who have made similar effort but somehow failed to make the cut this time, do not despair; it is not the end of the world. Remember, effort is a measure of success and that failure is indeed a road to success.

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