

Thank you, teachers, for your selfless contributions to nation

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

- Weekend Guest - New Sunday Times - 05/16/2004

Today is *Hari Guru*, or Teachers' Day, the day we pay tribute to those men and women who have in no small way made us what we are.

It is a time to remind ourselves of their selfless contributions to the nation since pre-Merdeka days.

Hari Guru is, therefore, an important day not only to record our appreciation of all those in the teaching profession but also, more urgently, to assist in raising it to the level that it deserves.

Of late, there are so many in other professions "stealing" the limelight and attention from teachers.

Foremost are those in the entertainment industry. They have been aided by the entertainment pages in the media which report on every tidbit, gossip and triviality about celebrities.

Today's youngsters are fed a steady diet of news on celebs, so it is not surprising that when asked to vote for their idols, schoolchildren readily name a popular entertainer.

Teachers rank far down the popularity list as was revealed in a survey carried out some years ago.

There is no reason to think why things are any different today, given how much more glamorous the status of entertainers has become of late.

Just as we thought that the status of teachers would be redeemed, thanks to the Ministry of Education's special scheme to allow them to obtain a university degree, another blow was delivered.

Reportedly less than one per cent of teachers are regarded as "competent". This seems to be the unkindest cut of all, given the track record the teaching profession has.

It is not the teaching profession which carries the heavy responsibility of developing the nation's human and intellectual capital?

Indeed, many of our political leaders and bureaucrats have benefited from the Malaysian teaching profession.

So, why all of a sudden do we see fit to label almost 10Q per cent of our teachers as no longer competent based on a newly-devised instrument — a test for civil servants — that seems to put more emphasis on "knowledge recall" *per se* rather than "competency"?

Does this mean that Malaysians have all this while been taught by a large pool of incompetent teachers?

Such an argument boggles the mind because many Malaysian students who have received their early education locally have been accepted and have done well in a number of top-class colleges and universities the world over.

Why are we so hard on our teachers? Why do we not recognise them for what they have done?

Could it be that the instrument to gauge them is an ill-conceived device we rushed into to create our brand of "competency"?

Just think of some of the implications. Firstly, what will happen if the 99-odd per cent of "incompetent" teachers opt not to teach until they rightly obtain the so-called level of competency as expected by the powers that be?

Secondly, would parents mind that their children are being taught by such so-called incompetent teachers?

Thirdly, the Prime Minister's hope of making national schools the schools of excellence has been dashed with the teachers labelled as incompetent.

Even before they had been labelled as "incompetent", their morale has been low and their remuneration not reflective of the responsibilities they shoulder.

To be fair, there is nothing wrong in trying to create a competent teaching profession. It is a commendable venture. The only question is: how better can we go about it?

Let us consider the goal to turn Malaysia into a hub for world-class education.

Imagine the consequences if that same overzealous "competency" yardstick's used on teachers/lecturers in private institutions of higher learning.

Would these teachers and lecturers fare better than their counterparts in government schools where only one per cent passed the "competency" test?

If they don't, what impression would this have on foreign students who plan to study in Malaysia?

Or more immediately, wouldn't the tens of thousands of international students now in Malaysia feel short-changed?

Would those who failed the official test of competency turn to the private sector where they would be valued as *bona fide* professionals and paid much more than what they get in public service?

The thinly-stretched teaching profession in institutions of higher learning in disciplines such as medicine, engineering and ICT, to name just a few, could experience a brain drain.

Several of these teaching staff have been appointed members and fellows of world-renowned academies and organisations.

In short, the image of Malaysian education and educationists has never been so battered.

Never before has the nation's fragile human and intellectual assets been so harshly judged, with far-reaching implications.

All this, seemingly, because of a myopic frenzy to impose our brand of "competency" that sadly undervalues the multiple contributions of the teaching profession on whom Malaysia's future depends.

It paints a bleak scenario as it reaffirms that teachers are truly unsung heroes whose reputation and image are taking another beating.

Some in officialdom may be blinkered, but most of us recognise teachers for what they are and for what they deserve. They are the true Malaysian idol.

So, as we wish those in the teaching profession a much-needed *Selamat Hari Guru*, let us hope that fair and good sense will prevail for the betterment of Malaysian education.

[Terms & Conditions](#)