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FROM STEM TO STEAM

Story-telling can power nation-building

WHEN I tell stories to young Malaysians, I walk away feeling here is another group of *hikayat* warriors to help me ensure our *hikayat* and folklore will be remembered and loved.

Poet Professor Emeritus Muhammad Salleh tells us: "The concept of an ideal, equal, caring and sustainable society lies in its folklore and here are embedded the central thoughts, psyche and wisdom of the people. Therefore, it is crucial that we preserve them."

As we celebrate our 64th Independence Day and Malaysia Day, we need to take a step back and reassess our national integration.

I find when I write or tell stories, and have stories from Sarawak and Sabah, from Johor to Perlis, the kids light up with excitement, especially if these are their home states.

They identify with the stories and this builds a sense of belonging and confidence.

That is why we need to relook and commit to adding the A — for Arts — in our country's focus on STEM (science, technology, En-



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glish and mathematics) in education.

We are moving in this holistic approach, STEAM, which is great as everywhere we look, there is a battle cry for more well-rounded life champions.

Stories and storytelling can help greatly. *Hikayat* and historical literature provide our younger generation with an insight not just into well-written works, but also history, geography, creative thinking and sometimes, even science.

More than 30 years before man landed on the moon, Hergé illustrated how Tin Tin and Captain Haddock flew to the moon.

Author Nisah Haron shared in her paper the evidence of science

fiction in our legends and folklore. This is so true.

Long before Jules Verne wrote *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, our *sejarah Melayu* related the story of a great king, Raja Chulan, who dived the depths of the sea in a *pesawat peti kaca* to arrive in Dika, an underwater kingdom.

Malay *hikayat*, legends and folklore are among the most popular literature preserved in our Malay manuscripts and through oral storytelling.

These legends, including those from our highly acclaimed dance theatres, *mak yong* and *mek mulung*, hold the key to understanding and revisualising our ancient world, and thus possess immense value to the development of our national culture and pride, in particular to nation building.

But beyond that, *hikayat*, legends and folklore contain a wealth of Malay knowledge from governance, protocol, diplomacy, architecture, shipbuilding, weaponry and textiles to medicinal practices, literature, entertainment, music, dance, wisdom and creative thinking.

They are proof that ancient societies in our land had highly conceptualised ideas and creativity, especially evident before colonisation.

They represent an advanced culture of rich literature, heritage and cosmopolitan life practised centuries ago, and encapsulate the psyche and intrinsic values of Malays as a people.

Since education today is aimed at prepping students for taking on the world around them, historical literature has never been more important.

Historical literature helps students learn, understand and examine the way language has evolved.

Being made aware of the way language has developed over time makes it more likely for them to appreciate their roots in the current milieu.

More often than not, *hikayat* or historical literature allows students to experience cultures, time periods and our predecessors' way of life.

This in turn helps develop critical thinking skills, a quality that can help them to learn other subjects well.

I often add Chinese, Indian, Japanese and other stories to my repertoire of legends.

This adds to the depth of stories we tell as a people.

Imagine how wonderful our tourism attractions would be when there is a story tied to every destination, every craft and every tourism product we offer.

Imagine how authentic and genuine these stories will sound when we tell them in a voice that is confident and proud.

Today, it is vital to share with others how these old forms of knowledge — *hikayat*, historical literature, legends and folklore — remain relevant and are in fact vital to our future aspirations in the modern world.

Malay *hikayat*, legends and folklore are truly the memories of our ancient civilisation.

They are key to our moving forward, from strength to strength. Rebuilding our nation, one generation at a time.

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