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NST Leader: Of bullies and thugs in schools, universities

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KUALA LUMPUR: It has happened again, in the very university — Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) — where in 2017 navy cadet Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain was bullied to death by several of his seniors.Why is such thuggery continuing in schools and other institutions in the country? . — BERNAMA

IT has happened again, in the very university — Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) — where in 2017 navy cadet Zulfarhan Osman Zulkarnain was bullied to death by several of his seniors.

Zulfarhan was tortured with a hot iron while his hands and legs were tied. Six of them were sentenced to death and 12 others implicated were handed prison terms of three to four years by the Court of Appeal in July.

The death sentence could have served as a fresh lesson, but as it has turned out, it wasn't.

This time, the victim escaped fatal injuries, though a hot iron was allegedly used. Yet, why did it happen again, at UPNM?

And why is such thuggery continuing in schools and other institutions in the country?

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim offered a two-part answer to the questions at a dialogue at UPNM on Friday.

One, our education system emphasises knowledge, but not character.

Two, this is made worse by the culture of tolerance towards bullying, thuggery and gangsterism.

We could not have put it better. Ignore the heart, and the mind embarks on its own frolic of madness.

Ignoring thuggery creates a culture of permissiveness toward it.

Now that we know the remedies, how do we proceed? There are measures for now and measures for the future.

The measures for now must begin with putting an end to the permissive attitude towards thuggery in educational institutions.

This must start with headmasters, principals, vice-chancellors and college heads, as suggested by the prime minister.

Zero tolerance for bullying must originate there. Followership often needs an example to follow.

Incidents of bullying that refuse to go away say one thing: zero tolerance for thuggery isn't a culture of the institution.

Consider schools. According to statistics disclosed in the Dewan Rakyat by the Education Ministry in November last year, bullying in schools is on the uptrend.

Last year, there were 4,994 cases, a significant increase from 3,887 in 2022 and 326 in 2021.

The figures do not give the true picture of the problem because not all cases are reported.

To be blunt, bullying is a pervasive problem. And a permissive attitude helps it thrive.

Now for measures for the future. Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all, said Aristotle.

Surprisingly, the Western education model, which pays homage to Greek philosophy, has chosen to give the Aristotlian wisdom a miss.

Malaysia, in adopting the Western education model, has done the same.

By this measure, many have missed an education.

For the longest time, our very own renowned philosopher, Royal Professor Tan Sri Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, has been writing — profusely, it must be said — about the need to educate the heart, too, but in contrast to the Grecian way.

To him, education isn't just teaching and insight, but also about changing attitudes and behaviours, two elements that go to build a good character.

The purpose of education, to Syed Muhammad Naquib, is to produce a good human being, one who knows one's rightful and proper place in this and the next world.

Malaysia hasn't been listening to him, but if it wants to produce good human beings, it is time it did.