

# Author's integrity to be preserved

> We're not out to crucify national laureate Datuk Abdullah Hussain, says *Interlok* panel chairman

BY **HUSNA YUSOF**  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PUTRAJAYA:** The independent panel to look into amending the *Interlok* novel, which met for the first time yesterday, has agreed that the integrity of the author, national laureate Datuk Abdullah Hussain, should be preserved.

Panel chairman Prof Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia said all eight panel members came to an agreement during the three-hour meeting that there should be no ill feelings towards the author.

"The issue is about the content (of the book). Not whether the author is good or bad or whatever. It is not our job to bring down the author.

"The issue should be dealt with honour and integrity, especially in light of the writer. We agree that the writer is an important person who must be respected and his integrity preserved.

"That was the spirit of our meeting today.

"Everyone of us has said, don't crucify the author. It is not correct," he told a press conference after the meeting at the Education Ministry here.

Shamsul Amri said the term of reference for the independent panel is to look into amending the book and submit a consensus recommendation to the government on the kind of amendments to be done.

He said the panel was expected to complete its task in a month and will have its second meeting in two or three weeks.

Other panel members were Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka director-general Datuk Termuzi Abdul Aziz, Universiti Malaya director of Malay Studies Academy Prof Datuk Zainal Abidin Borhan and Universiti Putra Malaysia Assoc Prof Dr Lim Swee Tin.

Also in the panel were Abdullah's wife Datin Siti Saroja

Basri and three MIC representatives, namely writer Uthaya Sankar SB, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris director of Global Education Prof Dr N.S. Rajendran and former Education Ministry officer G. Krishnabahawan.

The novel sparked controversy following the ministry's decision to use it as the literature component of the Bahasa Malaysia subject for Form Five students beginning this year, as it was deemed to contain passages sensitive to the local Indian community.

Certain quarters alleged that the book contained elements of racism while others defended it as a novel depicting the theme of integration of the country's three major races in the period from 1900 to independence in 1957.

Last month, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said *Interlok* would continue to be used for students in Zone 2 covering Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Selangor and Negri Sembilan this year.

However, the government has agreed to amend the parts regarded as sensitive.