

The last say...

I REFER to the letters entitled "Many theories to evolution" and "Teach theories in context" (*StarEducation*, Jan 22), which were written in response to my earlier letter on the Science Ministry's position on the Theory of Evolution.

I agree that there are always alternative viewpoints and theories, whether held by scientists or by the laymen.

But the Science Ministry's survey on public science awareness did not ask about different theories and hypotheses.

It referred specifically to the theory of evolution, and pronounced it false.

Truth in science has never been absolute.

Our understanding of science is dynamic, and positions held at any one time are often not tenable at another time, in the light of new findings.

For example, the atom used to be held as the ultimate indivisible particle of matter but we have long discarded that thinking.

In the teaching of science, however, it is the prevailing accepted knowledge that should be promulgated, even if alternative ideas are taught alongside.

Thus, the issue here is not whether the generally accepted scientific dogma is correct, or if an alternative interpretation is correct, or even if it is possible that both are correct.

The question is whether the Science Ministry should have taken it upon itself to denounce the current scientific thinking.

The Evolution Theory is by no means the only instance where the Science Ministry has taken a stance against current scientific thinking.

Another publication *The Public Awareness of Science and Technology Malaysia 2000* (available from the ministry's website www.mastic.gov.my) describes a similar survey, but with an additional five True/False statements.

One of the statements read: "The universe

began with a huge explosion". This was deemed False.

Today, the Big Bang Theory is a broadly-accepted cosmological theory for the origin of our universe.

It postulates that the universe started with an explosion that created not only fundamental subatomic particles and thus matter and energy, but also space and time itself.

This theory is consistent with Einstein's Theory of Relativity and has passed rigorous scientific tests.

In renouncing the Big Bang Theory, the Science Ministry is essentially asserting that scientific luminaries like Stephen Hawking have got it wrong.

Well, perhaps they have – scientists are not infallible, as we have often seen in the past.

However, until more compelling scientific evidence is at hand, the current thinking prevails.

The Science Ministry's rejection of the Big Bang Theory is tantamount to a declaration that the 1978 Nobel Prize for physics awarded to Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson was a mistake!

Controversy over the Evolution Theory arises in part because it is thought to run counter to the concept of divine creation, expounded in some religions.

Some find the Big Bang Theory troubling because it implies that the universe had a beginning.

But the debate digresses from the point of my original letter.

My point was, whether it is fitting that the Science Ministry should pass judgement against the flow of conventional scientific wisdom, and whether it is in the interest of Malaysian science to do so.

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Via e-mail