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Syariah-Implementation

SYARIAH LAWS IN MALAYSIA AHEAD OF INDONESIA, SAYS PROF OSMAN

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, June 13 (Bernama) -- Steps towards a comprehensive implementation of syariah laws in Malaysia are ahead of Indonesia despite the multiracial and multireligious composition of the Malaysian population, Datuk Dr Osman Bakar of Georgetown University here said Thursday.

In a conference on the politics of syariah in the two countries, the Malaysian professor of Islamic studies said that while syariah laws at present are limited to such matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, the Malaysian government is taking steps to incorporate environmental, labour and financial matters into the syariah laws.

Umno, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, seemed to be more in favour of incorporating Islamic values acceptable to all Malaysians into the existing civil laws, while the opposition PAS appears to be more in favour of syariah laws in its classical form especially hudud laws.

Dr Osman projected that any extreme views coming from Muslims would eventually be moderated by the non-Muslims in the implementation of syariah laws in Malaysia by virtue of the country's multireligious character and the demands of democracy.

It is possible for non-Muslims to accept laws and institutions based on Islamic principles, for example Islamic banking. According to sources, more non-Muslims take advantage of the facilities offered by Islamic banking.

Dr Osman also cited the example of PAS which suspended hudud laws after a series of political dialogue with the non-Muslims.

"If they want to be in power, they have to be pragmatic enough to consider the views of the non-Muslims," said Dr Osman, Chair of Islam in South-East Asia at Georgetown.

He said that the implementation of syariah is complex in Malaysia because of the pluralistic society, the important roles of the nine Sultans and the King in religious affairs, and voices from the opposition parties such as PAS, the DAP and vocal non-governmental organisations like Sisters in Islam.

Dr Amirul Hadi, professor in Arabic and Islamic history at the Ar-Raniry State Institute of Islamic Studies in Banda Aceh, said that Islamic radicals under former President Suharto were repressed because the then president was pushing for the more secular Pancasila principles.

While economic development was successful, it was not followed by social and economic equality, creating a wider gap between the rich and the poor, which ultimately led to radicalism among the lower class.

The collapse of the Suharto regime led to lawlessness, "the Muslim groups took over", and the debate over syariah law is on the rise, said Amirul.

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