

Jais: Shiite adherents not scared of ISA
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 28, 2010

Selangor Islamic Authority (Jais) deputy director of enforcement Mohamad Rais Rasid said that the use of the Internal Security Act had failed to deter the Shiite sect's activities.

"Some of them were arrested under the ISA, and yet they are still active," he said.

Mohamad Rais (right) added that the Islamic authorities will nevertheless continue to monitor and take action against the group it labeled as deviant even though it may not be able to stamp it out completely.

"Even if actions against them failed to eradicate the movement, at least the public knows what Shiism is."

"If there are actions from religious authorities - and if they truly understand what Islam is and our faith as followers of the Sunnah Wal Jamaah school of thought - they will stay away from Shiite teachings," reasoned the Jais official.

Some of the more aggressive actions that have been taken against Shiite adherents included the 1997 crackdown which saw 10 leaders of the sect held for two years without trial under the dreaded ISA for causing "religious disharmony" and being "a national threat".

These include lecturers Lutpi Othman, Fadzullah Shuib and Che Kamarulzaman Che Ismail.

Nine of them were released in 1998 - one year after their detention, while Che Kamarulzaman was only released in 1999, though he is reportedly still living under restrictions to his personal freedom.

All three Shiite practitioners however are still active in practicing and propagating Shiite teachings to date.

Shiite teachings persistent

Commenting on the resilience of the branch of Islam thought considered deviant in Malaysia, Mohamad Rais said that the persistence of the belief can be seen via the blossoming of blogs and websites about Shiism.

"However, we cannot pinpoint where they are operating from, because it is difficult to trace blogs. If we have the location, we will investigate thoroughly one by one," he said.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) website, there are an estimated 2,000 people who professed the minority Shiite branch of the Islamic faith, considered to be deviant in Malaysia.

The government considers only the Sunni denomination to be legal in Malaysia. Sunni Islam is the world's largest branch of the religion, followed by Shiite Islam.

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