

Ex-mufti: Wrong to say criticising leaders is 'haram'
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Religious scholar and former Perlis mufti Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin today joined the Bersih 2.0 debate, accusing the authorities of "brown-nosing" clerics against the movement for clean and fair elections.

While he did not specifically mention Bersih 2.0 nor the July 9 rally, Mohd Asri (left) defended the people's right to peaceful assembly and took on arguments made against the movement at Friday sermons leading up to the rally.

In a statement today, Mohd Asri, who is an associate professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia, said it was wrong to say that criticising leaders was haram, as was done in the sermons.

In proving this, he quoted Prophet Muhammad who, according to the first caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty and the prophet's scribe Muawiyah Abi Sufyan, had said that leaders whose followers just followed in silence were doomed to Hell.

Mohd Asri said it was a leap of logic to say that criticising the government was wrong in a democratic system, because the role of politicians, lawmakers and scholars was to criticise the government.

"The system will be impotent and the people will be doomed to ruin... a fatwa forbidding open criticism of government is a case of over brown-nosing," he said.

Worse still, when scholars have the sole role of defending leaders, they would go out of their way "to be heroes" in the eyes of the leaders.

"For example, when people say the people have the right to object to a leader through peaceful means, they (such scholars) will feel it is a call to arms against the leader... and start to read edicts that forbid waging wars against leaders.

"But (the people) are not abusing or making any call to arms, but merely marching in peace and our religion says this is not wrong, unless it is violent," he said.

Who says demonstrations are always destructive?

Supporting the right to peaceful assembly, Mohd Asri said history had shown that demonstrations have brought much good to many parts of the world.

By way of example, he said, the United States had the Martin Luther King Jr movement to thank for the removal of discriminatory and oppressive practices against certain segments of society.

"How can we conclude that demonstrations bring destruction?! Even if we do not agree with (the reason to demonstrate), we must acknowledge the rights of those who support it.

"Forbidding something based on an assumption has no basis in Islam because we believe that everything should be encouraged until it is proven to be wrong," he said.

In a separate open letter, Mohd Asri, who was yesterday named on a 'terrorist watch list' issued by the National Security Council, called on the police to not abuse their powers to oppress the citizens.

"My brothers (in the police force), oppression is like a poison that will bite the oppressor. We may feel safe behind the shield of power on the day that we beat up an innocent person, hurt him or slander him.

"We feel safe behind our protective attire as the victim cannot recognise us. But God does not forget," he said in his lengthy letter.

Appealing to the police officers, who he said were entrusted with the noble role of protecting society from evil, Mohd Asri quoted Prophet Muhammad, who according to hadith collector Bukhari, had said: "Fear the prayers of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between this and God."

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