

Asri: Rather go secular if politics exploits religion

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By Abdul Rahim Sabri

Former Perlis mufti Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin said the concept of a secular state was better if religion was going to be exploited for political gains.

"Politics and religion should combine because religion guides politics. But when religion becomes a political tool, then I'm more willing (to accept) a secular state.

"I prefer a country that separates religion and politics because if religion is being exploited for politics then at least the religion is safe and only politicians face flak.

"When people do wrong and try to justify their actions in the name of Allah, then it's best to just separate them," he told an Islamic Jurisprudence convention in Shah Alam yesterday.

Mohd Asri said that religious men "look bad" when they attempt to use religion as a political tool.

He adds if states arbitrarily use God's name, it would eventually make God appear cruel.

"It looks as if (God) accepts wrongdoings. This is why we must be careful with religious fatwas," he said.

'Umno's old kafir argument'

In a separate matter, Mohd Asri also criticised "certain Umno leaders" are using what he claims as 1980s PAS arguments concerning Muslim support for non-Muslim candidates in the general election.

He pointed out that there were still Umno leaders who say that Muslims cannot vote for non-Muslims even though PAS has long abandoned such a mentality.

"This is a problem for Umno. They try to be more Islamist than PAS by using PAS' 1980s arguments. (Muslims) cannot vote or mix with kafirs (non-believers).

"I have heard this argument since I was in primary school. Even PAS does not say such things anymore, but Umno is saying that (Muslims) cannot vote for non-Muslims.

"I support neither side, but if you say this is true for other people but not true for yourself, that is odd," he said in reference to Umno's non-Muslim partners in BN.

Asri urged a stop to such practices and said people should instead vote for candidates that can bring about benefit for the community.

Demostrations permitted

Commenting on demonstrations against the government, Asri said this was permitted in Islam but subjected to a few rules.

"For a democratic government, people can gather but they cannot be violent or damage property. The purpose of gathering is simply to advocate for change in something that they find difficult.

"That is why I suggest that the government should allow people to gather, give them water and bread. Everyone will be happy.

"What is the problem? Why the need to fire (tear gas)? It will only invite new problems unless the protesters act violently," he said.

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