

'Najib will lead us to religious strife'
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Without mincing his words, a Sarawak opposition leader has warned that following Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will plunge the state into darkness.

State PKR chief Baru Bian said this in response to Assistant Minister in the Chief Minister's Department (Islamic affairs) Daud Abdul Rahman, who said the state would comply with Najib's decision on the motion of the Private Member's Bill for hudud.

"Given his (Najib's) pathetic track record in controlling religious extremists and bigots in West Malaysia, we will be led into the dark abyss of racial strife and religious intolerance should we be so foolish as to follow him," Baru said.

The PKR leader also reminded Daud that Islam and hudud are not for the state.

"I was extremely disappointed and appalled to read Daud's statement. The statement shows his lack of understanding of the rights of Sarawak, which are protected under the Malaysia Agreement.

"For Sarawak, the stand is very clear. That the first of the 18 points relates to religion and points to the paramount concern our forefathers had about protecting this most precious freedom for Sarawakians," he said.

About 80% of Sarawak's 2.6 million people are Christians.

As a reminder, Baru said the absence of a state religion was one of the pivotal factors in Sarawak agreeing to join in the formation of Malaysia in 1963.

"Let there be no doubt then that in accordance with the vision of our forefathers, Sarawak remained and should remain a secular state," he added.

The PKR leader said even former chief minister Taib Mahmud had consistently rejected all forms of religious extremism in Sarawak.

"How can we simply follow the PM's stand when he is neither here nor there?"

"The PM's response should be that Malaysia is a secular country as provided in the Federal Constitution and that there is no place for the implementation of hudud law unless the Federal Constitution is amended to allow for it," the lawyer and Ba'Kelalan state rep added.

Notwithstanding the assurance given by some political leaders that hudud will not affect

non-Muslims even if it is implemented, Baru said he was not convinced as recent developments in West Malaysia have been infringing on the rights of non-Muslims.

"One instance is the banning of Bibles in hotel rooms in Pahang by the state Islamic Council.

"Clearly this deprives the rights of traveling Christians to read their Holy Book. There is nothing wrong with having both the Bible and the Quran in hotel rooms and leaving it to the guests to read whichever one is applicable.

"This would be in accordance with the principle of religious freedom. We should give Muslims credit for their ability to hold steadfast to their religious beliefs and not be confused by the mere presence of a Bible in the room," he added.

Baru also clarified that hudud is not being opposed in order to reject Islam.

"We are talking about maintaining the status quo under the social contract that was agreed among the partners in the Federation of Malaysia," he added.

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