

## **Minister censured after advising Muslims to avoid Bon Odori event**

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Religious Affairs Minister Idris Ahmad has been criticised for advising Muslims not to participate in the upcoming Bon Odori event.

In a statement, Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) councillor Muhammad Shakir Ameer said Bon Odori has been observed in Malaysia for 30 years and does not contain non-Islamic religious influence or rituals that can lead Muslims astray.

"From my understanding, the main attraction is the musical elements of it such as the dance and the drums... Why does it have to become an issue now?"

"Muslims should be given the chance to evaluate themselves on various cultural celebrations in a very diverse Malaysia.

"We cannot allow opinions from PAS leaders to deny us Malaysians from embracing cultural diversity," said Shakir.

Bon Odori is a dance performed during the Bon - a religious and cultural festival

for ancestral worship that originated in Japan.

In Malaysia, the annual Bon Odori event is organised in Penang, Sabah, and Selangor.

However, the festival in Malaysia is largely stripped of its religious significance and instead becomes a carnival celebrating Japanese culture in general.

The event in Selangor - often touted as the largest outside of Japan - is organised by the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur and the Japanese Embassy, among others, while being supported by the Selangor state government.

This year's Selangor Bon Odori event will be held at the Kompleks Sukan Negara in Shah Alam.

The highlight of the event is a dance around a stage for music performers. Stalls selling Japanese food often accompany the event.

According to Idris, research conducted by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim) confirmed that Bon Odori contained influences from non-Islamic religions.

"Therefore, we are advising the Muslims not to participate in the festival or any other programmes that are against their faith and creed," he said, according to national news agency Bernama.

Shakir argued that Bon Odori, as practised in Malaysia, was more of a cultural and commercial event rather than a religious one.

"Bon Odori has been celebrated for more than 30 years in Malaysia. Throughout the years it has been commercialised and celebrated via commercial or community centres to cater to non-Japanese as well.

"In Malaysia, we have many Manga and anime fans as well through the Japanese influence," he said.

Shakir added that the event was also symbolic of Malaysia's close ties with Japan and that Shah Alam hosts many Japanese investments, citing giants such as Panasonic, Sharp, JTI, and Shin-Etsu Chemical among others.

"Strong diplomatic relations will not only create knowledge sharing in technology but will also promote cultural exchange for both nations.

"This is something a party like PAS doesn't understand. They only care about

judging others and will never look at the bigger picture on nation-building," said  
Shakir.

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