

Higher Education Ministry: No Wahhabi witch-hunt
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The Higher Education Ministry has denied that a witch-hunt has been launched for the Wahhabbi school of thought followers, assuring that the government had never linked that school with terrorism nor will it victimise its adherents in the fight against terrorism.

"This (allegations that the government is persecuting Wahhabis) is overstretching the argument. Wahhabism is a school of thought that is a part of the Sunnah Wal Jamaah, accepted by the authorities.

azlan"JI (Jemaah Islamiah) and Wahhabism are being misunderstood, causing the two to be linked to terrorism," said Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah (left) in answer to a supplementary question from Mahfuz Omar (PAS-Pokok Sena) during this morning's question and answer session.

This follows fears expressed by the opposition, PAS in particular, that the government may use the terrorism issue to create a sense of 'Islamaphobia' by linking Wahhabism and those who pursued Islamic rule, like the party, to dub them as terrorists.

PAS parliamentarians held a press conference in Parliament on Tuesday to air concern that the government is looking to make scapegoats of Wahhabis and label those who favour that Islamic school of thought as terrorists.

The deputy minister stressed that neither the government nor Bukit Aman ever made the connection between the two, pointing the finger, instead, at Jakim's Institut Latihan Islam Malaysia (Ilim) assistant director Zamihan Mat Zin as the culprit.

Varsity academic freedom pledged

"The person who gave the briefing, has a problem with the former Perlis MB (Shahidan Kassim), his personal problem had been amplified into a national security issue," alleged Saifuddin.

"I don't think that it is suitable to label anyone or any organisation practicing Wahhabism as having links with terrorism. And I don't think we can involve the four people mentioned and label them as Wahhabis or terrorists," he said, without naming names

It is learnt that the four were former Perlis mufti Mohd Asri Zainul Abidi, the state's current mufti Juanda Jaya, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang and Shahidan.

Saifuddin said that he is explaining the government's stance and what actually occurred during the briefing in order to prevent the issue from being misconstrued and misused.

"I am worried that this will bring about Islamaphobia, as had hapened in the West, who in their war against terror, linked it to Islam.

"I give my assurance that we will not conduct a witch-hunt against students or lecturers, or PTPTN borrowers, and give the reassurance that we will not make scapegoats of anyone just because they profess a school of thought that some find unsuitable," added the deputy minister.

Saifuddin pledged that the government will resolve the terrorism and militancy issue in the best possible way and in cooperation with everyone, urging all involved not to try and mix this with other matters or politicise it.

"We also guarantee that we will not repress intellectual thought and academic freedom in universities, if not there will be a lot of books which can only be read by some and not others," said the Temerloh parliamentarian.

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