

# 'No inter-religious woes in Kelantan'

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## INDONESIAN SCHOLAR: KEY ISSUE IN STATE IS UMNO-PAS POLITICAL CONTESTATION

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**BANGI:** The main issue in Kelantan is the political contestation between Umno and PAS, not between Muslims and non-Muslims, an Indonesian scholar has observed.

It is not true that Kelantan has hardly any space for non-Muslims as there is religious tolerance for this group, which constitutes about 6% of the state's population, Dr Budiawan Purwadi said.

"There are no inter-religious problems in Kelantan. For non-Muslims there, there is no sense of being threatened and there is enough freedom to do their own religious practices.

"As for Muslims, the non-Muslims are not a threat and they see them all as fellow Kelantanese, regardless of their religion and ethnic affiliations," he said at a seminar on Religious Tolerance and Political Contestation in Kelantan recently.

Budiawan is a visiting fellow at the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, under the sponsorship of the Bangkok-based Asian Scholarship Foundation.

He read for a PhD in the Southeast Asian Studies Programme of the National University of Singapore in 2003 and teaches in the Graduate Programme in Religious and Cultural Studies at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta.

During his six-month fellowship beginning March, he stayed in Kelantan for two-and-a-half months to complete research

on religious tolerance in the state.

Non-Muslims in the state, he noted, understand that as minorities, they have to tolerate some things in the name of pragmatism, as a matter of survival.

"For example, non-Muslims could accept the sense of having been conditioned, not forced, to adapt to the Muslims' sacred time.

"In Kelantan, Friday is prayer day, not only for Muslims, but also for non-Muslims as even the Christians' Sunday School is held on Fridays."

Having been conditioned to adapt to the current system is not necessarily understood as having been discriminated against, so long as there is space to negotiate, Budiawan added.

However, he said, a sense of being haunted by the shadow of an Islamic state is not completely gone, so non-Muslims in the state see Umno as the guardian of the Federal Constitution.

"They believe that so long as the constitution regarding the status of Islam and religious freedom is not amended, PAS's idea of an Islamic state will not come true 100%.

"At the same time, non-Muslims have a sense of anxiety about the situation if PAS were no longer in control because they perceive the party as a sort of guardian of social order as it has been strongly-rooted



there.

"They think if a party has historically down-rooted in one area and can serve everyone, once it is no longer there, there may be some sort of instability."

Budiawan concluded that the consequence of seeing the contestation between the two parties in such a way is that the people may tend to vote for Umno in the parliamentary constituencies

and for PAS in the state seats.

Asked why he chose Kelantan, he said inter-religious conflicts, especially between

Muslims and Christians, had been so prevalent in Indonesia in the past few years, such as in Ambon and Poso, that he decided to study the situation in Kelantan where non-Muslims are not only in a predominantly Muslim state but are also ruled by an Islamist party.

"One important point I have learnt is that with being a minority, does not necessarily come a sense of paranoia about the religious and cultural expressions of the majority if the former's right to articulate their own cultural and religious expressions are guaranteed, not only legally but socially.

"There must be a sort of social contract based on which various religious and cultural communities can live together and share common space, regardless of the degree of 'integrated'-ness."