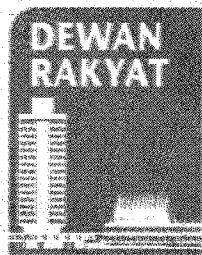


MP explains meaning of keris in Malay culture

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■ Reports by Eileen Ng and June Ramli

THE keris, an item of controversy during the Umno general assembly, became the subject of discussion in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Out of the blue, during question hour, Datuk Mohd Alwi Che Ahmad (BN-Ketereh) raised the issue to explain the meaning of the keris in Malay culture.

It was his supplementary question which had nothing to do with the original question to Deputy Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Wong Kam Hoong.

Alwi stood up to say: "The keris is not a symbol of violence, but actually represents power and justice in Malay culture."

He added that he must explain it because there was misunderstanding among non-Malays about the way

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein brandished a keris at the wing's meeting during the party assembly last week.

Alwi went on to ask Wong whether the ministry would want to explain to the public the meaning of the keris.

Wong did not address his question directly, merely saying that being a multi-racial country, everyone should interact with one another to achieve a better understanding of each other's culture.

"This is why the ministry or-

ganises various activities like open house to foster greater interaction and understanding," he said.

Wong said the Chinese community's love for alcohol could be viewed with worry by certain races.

"The general understanding is that the Chinese only wanted to get drunk, but many are unaware that alcohol is part of Chinese culture. It is used during prayers and by the women during their confinement."

Later, when met at the lob-

by, Wong explained that being a non-Malay, he was not in a position to explain the role of the keris in Malay culture.

"I believe Alwi brought up the issue as he believed the non-Malay community did not understand the symbolism associated with the keris.

"For Alwi, the Chinese community generally views it as a symbol of aggression," he said, adding that the ministry had no plans to explain the matter to the people.

Alwi, when interviewed in the lobby, said: "Even all our

Sultans carry their respective keris during coronation ceremonies. This issue should not be questioned at all. What's the fuss all about? If you don't understand the matter, come to us and we'll tell you," he said.

Alwi also said that he was once mistaken about the Chinese lion dance, thinking the lion represented a wild animal.

After he understood the cultural and symbolic meaning of the dance, he said he accepted it as part of Malaysian culture.