



## On the beat

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NO one would bat an eyelid if someone walked around Kuala Lumpur's busy Bukit Bintang area dressed up as an anime or superhero character.

Everyone would just assume that the person was heading for a cosplay event. But it's something else when PAS members arm themselves with fake weapons in rural Setiu, Terengganu.

PAS has never been known to endorse such performance art, but since last week, following the controversial parade comprising PAS members brandishing fake swords, spears, bows and arrows, cosplay has become the buzzword of party leaders.

The march was reportedly part of a two-day PAS Youth gathering dubbed "Himpunan Pemuda Islam Terengganu" (Himpit).

There was also a pickup truck with a huge fake sword in its cargo bed while some participants, dressed in medieval-militant garb with a green theme, were seen standing in the same cramped space.

The gathering has caused con-

# Poser parade

It's difficult to see a recent gathering as a cultural event or something in the name of national unity.



**Cosplay convention?:** The Himpit parade participants, dressed in medieval militant garb with a green theme, also carried fake swords, spears, bows and arrows. - Facebook

cern because the Islamist party has a blemished past. Its leadership may not endorse violence or militancy of any kind, but given the party's track record, questions have obviously been raised.

The defenders of the parade should not blame non-Muslims for their conjecture because criticism came from the Malays as well. So there's no need to play the race-religion card. It's pathetic to resort to such a tactic.

PAS, predictably, fended off criticisms against the party with the routine line of "anti-Islam and Islamophobia", but the truth is that PAS is just another political party led by ordinary human beings with political expediency and ambitions.

clashes between Umno and PAS peaked with Umno members declared infidels (apostates) and those who died as al-shahid (martyrs) by PAS.

PAS members have also been involved in terrorist activities. That is a fact, although the party has issued immediate statements each time to distance itself from these individual acts, including resorting to expulsions from the party.

In 2014, PAS activist Mohd Lofti Ariffin aka Abu Afghan, 46, was killed in an assault by Syrian government forces. He claimed he was fighting for the Afnad-al-Sham faction, a breakaway from the Islamic State (IS) group.

Another Malaysian fighter, Mohammad Fadhlan Shahidi, was also killed in the incident.

Mohd Lofti, a former Kedah PAS information chief, had attracted a large following on social media with regular posts of pictures, videos, and calls for jihad from the Syrian frontline.

The veteran jihadist had also fought in Afghanistan against the Russians and was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) upon returning to Malaysia.

But what was disturbing following his death in Syria was the eulogising on social media by several PAS personalities, underlining sympathy for the militants' cause that created a security headache for the Malaysian government.

One senior PAS leader praised Lofti as a "martyr" in a Facebook post and reportedly recounted a religious anecdote from what he said was Lofti's final visit to Malaysia in 2013 when he helped with PAS flood-relief efforts.

But the party had also said Lofti's membership had been terminated

earlier and that it disavowed militant actions.

In 2014, the party sacked three party members who were among five people wanted by police for involvement in militant activities. They were Universiti Malaya (UM) lecturer Dr Mahmud Ahmad @ Abu Handzalah, Selayang Municipal Council worker Muhammad Joramee Awang Ramee and UM stationary shop owner Mohd Najib Husen,

They were accused of serving the IS movement in Iraq, according to police.

Then PAS secretary-general Datuk Mustafa Ali announced their immediate expulsions following the police disclosure, saying they were mere ordinary members.

In Afghanistan, PAS branch committee member Zainon Ismail aka CN Al Afghani, also joined the fight and even published a 112-page book with pictures of himself and other Malaysians championing the same cause.

Even the late Kelantan menteri besar's son, Nik Adli Nik Abdul Aziz, was detained under the ISA for involvement in the radical Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) movement in 2001.

There are many others. You only need to do a search online to find out more. The party may have officially condemned these radicals by sacking them, but it's fair to suggest that it continues to attract members with the plan of setting up an Islamic state in Malaysia as the ultimate goal.

Our security forces must be commended for their vigilance and network of intelligence in keeping Malaysia safe, sound and sane.

Don't count on our politicians, who just want to strike deals without bothering about the long-term consequences.

So, there are good reasons why Malaysians should worry when PAS members put up an act with fake swords, spears, and other weapons. It may be cosplay to PAS, but not to others.

Any way you slice it, PAS' reputation precedes itself.