

'NEW GUIDELINES FOR MUSLIMS UNNECESSARY'

They are aware of the boundaries to observe, says Anwar

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HERE is no need to introduce new guidelines for Muslim participation in non-Muslim celebrations and ceremonies, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said.

He said Muslims should already be familiar with existing guidelines and the boundaries they must observe, without the need for additional regulations.

He said he would present the cabinet's decision on the matter to Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, who is also National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia chairman.

"What is important is that Muslims protect their *aqidah* (faith) and recognise the rules and limits that must not be crossed.

"When I came here today (to Batu Caves), I was not attending a religious ceremony. Similarly, Gobind (Singh Deo) often visits mosques in his constituency, but does not participate in religious rituals. This is entirely normal.

"Let's not complicate matters or create unnecessary anxiety in society," he said after visiting Batu Caves yesterday ahead of the Thaipusam preparations.

Present were Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari, Digital Minister Gobind and Deputy Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development Minister Datuk Seri Ramanan Ramakrishnan.

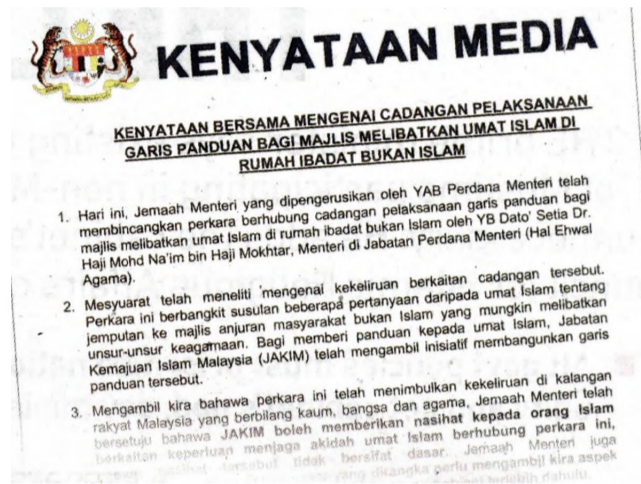
Anwar said the issue should no longer be raised as it had been resolved in the cabinet meeting he chaired earlier yesterday.

He said there was no issue with Muslims engaging in Malaysia's multiracial and multi-religious society.

"I am also here today to support the development of this area (Batu Caves). We are, of course, helping to improve the hall facilities and recognising the importance of Thaipusam to the Hindu community.

"We will help where necessary to ensure they can observe religious practices without issues."

The issue began after Minister in the Prime Minister's Depart-



An excerpt of the joint statement issued by the minister in the Prime Minister's Department (religious affairs) and national unity minister.

ment (Religious Affairs) Datuk Na'im Mokhtar announced that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim) was finalising guidelines on Muslim participation in events held, at non-Islamic places of worship.

Na'im said the guidelines aimed to ensure Muslims did not engage in actions that could be deemed sensitive or inappropriate according to Islamic principles.

Following this Na'im and National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang issued a joint statement, saying all government policies must prioritise national unity and receive cabinet approval before implementation.

They said Jakim had taken the initiative to map out the guidelines following queries from Muslims on invitations to events organised by non-Muslims that may include religious elements.

However, they said while Jakim could give advice to Muslims, it did not constitute official policy.

"Given that this has sparked confusion among Malaysia's multiracial and multi-religious population, the cabinet has agreed that Jakim can issue advice to Muslims on the need to preserve their faith," they said.

"However, this advice does not

constitute official policy.

"The cabinet also reminds everyone that all policies drawn up must take into account aspects of national unity and obtain prior approval from the cabinet."

The National Unity Ministry said the ministers would continue to promote "Dialog Harmoni" to strengthen interfaith harmony and encourage interaction among adherents of different religions.

They said inclusive discussions that consider the sensitivities of all communities were crucial to fostering national unity.

"All matters closely related to interfaith harmony will be further discussed in the Interfaith Harmony committee meeting.

"The meeting is scheduled for this month, where perspectives from 24 religious representatives, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Taoism and Baha'i, will be heard.

"They said as a nation rich in diversity, 'Malaysia had long served as a model of unity and harmony for the world'.

"The Madani government recognises that the nation's stability depends on the wellbeing of its people, who live in peace and harmony."



Datuk Na'im Mokhtar



Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang