

Hadith, fatwas abused to justify Bersih ban, says Asri

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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal



The influential Islamic scholar said today that Islam should not be used as a means to a political end by governments in the Muslim world. — file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 13 — Influential Islamic scholar Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin today charged that hadiths and religious edicts were abused by politicians within the federal government to justify its suppression of the Bersih rally last weekend.

The government, in the two weeks leading up to last Saturday's rally, had issued special Friday sermons in mosques throughout Kuala Lumpur condemning the rally and accusing its organisers of manipulating Islam. Hadiths were also quoted to support the hardline position.

Asri, the former Perlis Mufti, pointed out that Malaysia, like many Middle Eastern countries, had issued fatwas condemning those who wished to take part in the peaceful demonstration on July 9.

These fatwas, said Asri, were issued by "literalist" Islamic scholars — those who understand the contents of the Al-Quran but insist on only literal interpretations, without any revisions.

"These people are against the formation of any society, political party, demonstration, nasyid, art and much more. If their fatwas are accepted, the Islamic world will crumble and people will not flourish.

"What is bad is that this movement is being benefited by cruel and corrupt leaders within the Islamic world. When hadiths are interpreted politically and literally, it is as if Islam gives leaders a "licence" to oppress their people while the people are tied, gagged, without any ability to object or act," said Asri in a statement today.

What made things worse, said the academic, was that Quranic verses which are seen to be in favour of the ruling government would be read and promoted through every possible channel, while verses which warned people of the "cruelty of leaders" were ignored.

"In Malaysia, we saw this phenomenon during the heated demonstration recently ... this (discussion) here is not meant to support or condemn the peaceful demonstration, but just to discuss some people's understanding of certain hadiths," said Asri.

Asri cited a hadith by Huzairah r.a and said that it was often used to defend the actions of leaders and to prohibit people from criticising the government, in whatever form.

The hadith quotes Huzairah as asking Prophet Muhammad S.A.W what should be done if the Prophet comes upon another leader who does not adhere to the Prophet's teachings. Prophet Muhammad's response was that even in such situations, loyalty and obedience to that said leader would be a priority.

The hadith in Malay is as follows: Hadis Huzaifah r.a: "Akan ada selepasku para pemimpin yang berpetunjuk bukan dengan petunjukku, bersunnah bukan dengan sunnahku, dan akan bangkit dalam kalangan mereka lelaki-lelaki yang jantung hati mereka seperti jantung hati syaitan dalam tubuh insan". Kata Huzaifah: "Apa yang patut aku lakukan wahai Rasulullah, jika aku mendapati keadaan itu?". Jawab baginda: "Dengar dan taat kepada ketua, sekalipun belakangmu dipukul, hartamu diambil, dengar dan taatlah" (Riwayat Muslim).

"This hadith becomes a sticking point to the extent that there are those who say 'if leaders kill my family, I will not charge them in court.' Imagine if all Muslims felt like that; then leaders of the Muslim world would rule without unopposed," Asri added.

He stressed that a hadith cannot be read separately but needed to be examined and understood in its entirety, together with the relevant Quranic verses.

"If we do not do that, it will be a flawed interpretation ... at a time when the world is protecting human rights, we are suddenly pulling our people back with literal interpretations. How then can the beauty of Islam be appreciated by say, a person who has just learnt about the religion?"

"In some ways, leaders in Western countries are more honest and responsible towards their people compared to leaders in Muslim countries today ... sometimes animals in Western countries are treated better than a Muslim who lives in a Muslim country — often beaten, ridiculed, imprisoned, or even killed without ever having the courage to speak out," Asri said.

The academic stressed that no leader was above the law, and warned religious institutions against using Islam to defend the actions of corrupt and unjust leaders.

Bersih went ahead with Saturday's rally despite being denied police permission, plunging parts of Kuala Lumpur into chaos and resulting in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and the death of a PKR division leader's husband.

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