

Asri: Politicians causing need for inter-religious guidelines
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 19 — Guidelines for Muslim and non-Muslim interaction are needed as politicians have abused Islam to further partisan ends, a former Perlis Mufti said today.

Dr Asri Zainul Abidin (picture) said the increasing importance of Islam among Muslims was being exploited by the government and the opposition who accuse each other of being unIslamic, causing confusion as to what is sanctioned by the religion.

"Everyone, especially Muslims, use Islam as a tool. So people are now very afraid this or that action goes against Islam but they don't know what real Islam is," he told The Malaysian Insider at the sidelines of the Himpunan Ulama, Cendekiawan Islam dan Penulis Maya here.

The maverick scholar stressed the need to reform public perception of Islam and "translate" the emotional relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims now to one based on knowledge.

He said Muslims must return to "original Islam" based on scripture to address the current situation, adding that the proposed guidelines would help do this.

"If not, there will be Umno fatwas, PAS fatwas, PKR fatwas, DAP fatwas, non-aligned fatwas. Everyone will create so many things and say this is allowed, this is not. This is politics. They should talk based on knowledge instead," he said.

The Ulama Association of Malaysia (PUM) said on Thursday official guidelines that govern conduct between Muslims and non-Muslims were needed to avoid any confusion between the two groups and to help people understand Islam.

PUM secretary-general Dr Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor said the guidelines will ensure those who did not have "authority" in Islam would no longer issue conflicting views and opinions.

The association recently urged Muslims to stay away from non-Muslims religious festivals following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's visit to Batu Caves in conjunction with Thaipusam celebrations.

Perlis Mufti Dr Juanda Jaya cautioned today, however, that the guidelines must be very limited in scope and should only concern itself with religious rituals and not cultural observances.

He said it was necessary for Muslims to consult non-Muslims in order to properly differentiate between the two without conflating them.

"The ones who know whether it is a religious ritual or cultural practice is that race or religion itself... We should refer to the adherent of that religion and not to our own perception," he said.

Juanda said Muslims should actually be encouraged to observe - but not join in on - religious rituals to foster mutual understanding between the different races and religions in Malaysia so that harmony can be preserved.

The involvement of politicians in religious matters should also be minimised so that race relations can be seen from a wider, more inclusive perspective, he added.

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