

'Christian' Indonesia a big threat to Malaysia, says Muslim academic
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 — A Christian-majority Indonesia could be a threat to a small Muslim nation like Malaysia, controversial academic Ridhuan Tee Abdullah has said as growing Christian proselytisation in the Southeast Asian giant fuels fears of Islam's followers leaving the religion.

The Chinese-Muslim convert was weighing in on a recent furore in the world's most populous Muslim nation that is experiencing a growing wave of converts to Christianity — as many as two million people a year — that had sparked a recent campaign to reverse the religious trend called "Save Maryam".

Indonesia used to be 90 per cent Muslim, he said, but was now recording only 200 million Muslims out of a total population of 240 million.

"Mengikut jangkaan, jika sesuatu tidak dilakukan, pada 2035, Indonesia akan menjadi negara majoriti Kristian (According to estimates, if nothing is done, Indonesia will become a Christian-majority country by 2035).

"Jika perkara ini berlaku, ini satu ancaman besar kepada negara Islam kecil seperti Malaysia (If nothing is done, this will be a huge threat to a small Muslim nation like Malaysia)," said the Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia lecturer, in his column "Buka Minda (Open Mind)" published today by Malay daily Sinar Harian.

Tee, who is a member of the Islamic Consultative Council and Wasatiyyah panel in the Prime Minister's Department, has long styled himself a champion of Islam.

He noted that many Muslim Indonesians converted to Christianity due to a variety of factors including the high poverty rate there that caused some to "sell out" their faith and the lack of laws to protect Muslims against Christian proselytisation in contrast to Malaysia.

But the columnist, who also writes for Umno-owned Malay broadsheet Utusan Malaysia, said the Christianisation movement was on the upswing here.

Tee appeared to suggest that Christians were the "enemy" of Muslims, citing a passage from the Quran, Surah Al-Anfal.

He said Christians had great financial power around the world and the Malay archipelago was now their main target after they had "failed" in their missionary attempts in the West.

He warned that Christian evangelical movements could attempt to employ similar tactics here as they did in Indonesia and called on Muslim Malaysians to "save" their brethren in the archipelago.

"Ingatlah wahai saudaraku, orang Indonesia itu juga adalah saudara kita (Remember my brothers, the Indonesians are our brethren too).

"Selamat mereka, selamatlah kita (If they are safe, we too are safe)," he said.

In multicultural Malaysia, non-Muslims are barred by the law from proselytising their faiths to Muslims even as they are constitutionally guaranteed the freedom to practise their religions.

However, several right-wing religious groups have accused churches here of converting Muslims to Christianity and turning them into apostates, which is viewed as a serious offence and which has strained Christian-Muslim ties here over the past few years.

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