

Shia: A fine effort to split PAS

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In early 2012, PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang Hadi toured several countries in the Middle East while taking part in an international conference on Islam.

On his return, Abdul Hadi jotted down some useful points on the events in Syria, which was published in the Islamist party's online newspaper, the Harakah Daily.

To his mind, the ongoing strife in Syria was not a conflict between two sects – the Syiah and Sunni as portrayed by some in Malaysia.

"The government is dictatorial in nature but wears a democratic mask. In the name of strategic partnerships with world powers which is looking out for Israel, the Syrian government is oppressing its citizens

"Syria is different from other Arab countries as it does not recognise Israel and does not have any diplomatic ties with that country," Abdul Hadi said.

"Syria is also the gateway for Iran which is isolated from the world. It has also allowed Hamas and Jihadi Islami to use it as a base, while Hezbollah uses the country as a base.

"Hamas and Jihad Islami are from the Sunni sect, which is not the same sect as Bashar Assad who is from the Alawi sect. The same with Iran and Hezbollah which are with the Syiah Imamiyyah which is not the same sect as Bashar and his family," the Marang MP added.

To Abdul Hadi, ties between Iran and Hezbollah which is Shia; and strong links between Hamas and Jihad Islami which are Sunni with Syria were forged for their own strategic interests.

So when Bashar moved to suppress the revolt against his government, it was a fight between a people determined to rid itself of an oppressive ruler – not because of sectarianism.

So why are some Malaysian Muslims potraying the conflict in Syria as a fight between the Sunnis and the Shias?

Has it got to do anything with the country's politics? One PAS leader has an answer.

"Some people in PAS are now joining forces with Umno to finish me off," PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu told The Malaysian Insider when commenting on adverse reports about his courtesy call on a Syrian religious minister last year.

He said as a result of the visit some claimed that he supported Bashar as he had embraced the Shia sect.

Mohamad said he had repeatedly stated he supported the Iranian government and Hezbollah's stand and approach to uphold Islam and against Israel and the United States.

He said in the case of Syria, he feared the fall of Bashar Al Asad's government would result in another American puppet regime being installed like that in Iraq.

He felt it would be better to retain the current Syrian regime and allow Syrians to determine the destiny of their country.

He noted this stand was not popular with Malaysians who were exposed to news reports depicting the Bashar government's cruelty which killed women and children.

Mohamad noted the media's current penchant to play up the news about Shias, claiming that the sect had taken control of some institutions of higher learning while some PAS leaders were now Shiites.

The effect of such claims were also said to have cost Mohamad in his quest to win the Pendang parliamentary seat in the 13th general election.

There were claims Mohamad was sabotaged by party workers who were uneasy with his close ties with the Iranian regime which is Shiite.

PAS information chief Datuk Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man said in a statement yesterday that nobody from the party was involved with the Shiites.

He said the attack on the party appeared to be politically-motivated but there was no proof to back such claims.

Tuan Ibrahim, however, said there were party leaders who had personal ties with Iranian leaders or with the Middle East Islamic movements but it did not mean they are Shiites.

He told PAS members not to be swayed by such slanderous talk by its enemies aimed at getting the party leadership to fight each other by labeling them as being ulama, professional, liberal, Erdogan or even Shiites. - July 29, 2013.

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