

Diversity is God-given, sultan's consort reminds Muslims
Malaysian Insider
June 14, 2014
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God created diversity so that people from different backgrounds could interact with one another and achieved mutual respect, Tuanku Raja Zarith Sofia Sultan Idris Shah told Muslims today, amid rising racial and religious intolerance in multi-ethnic Malaysia.

The consort to the Sultan of Johor quoted two verses from the Quran – Al Maidah, verse 48 and Al Hujurat, verse 13 – which described how God had deliberately created diversity among mankind so that they may be tested as well as learn from one another.

“These verses clearly remind us that diversity is God-given. He created diversity...and this should encourage us to interact with each other and try to achieve mutual love and respect,” she told a seminar on “Extremism among the Muslims in Contemporary Times” at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) here.

Raja Zarith, who is UTM's chancellor, noted that even the Prophet Muhammad had declared the differences in his community as being God's will, and that he strived to achieve peace among the non-Muslim groups as well.

“In the past, learned Muslims expanded their knowledge and learning by translating important works from other civilisations,” she added.

She said that Malaysians should be proud that all major religions were represented in their country, adding that muhibbah or love was needed to maintain peace among the communities here.

“It is this spirit that helps us sustain the peace we have achieved so far, and this must be allowed to flourish so the younger generation can enjoy what we have had so far.”

Islamic enforcement agencies such as the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) and the Penang Islamic Religious Department (JHEAIPP) had recently disrupted a Hindu wedding in Selangor and a Taoist funeral in Penang, respectively, in their efforts to uphold Islam.

Their efforts have sparked outrage and criticism among Malaysians, but Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom had defended their actions and said they were carrying out their responsibilities.

In the controversy in Selangor, Jais disrupted the wedding ceremony of 32-year-old bride Zarinah Abdul Majid at a Hindu temple in Petaling Jaya after receiving reports that Zarinah could be a Muslim.

In Penang, the state religious authorities stopped the funeral service of Teoh Cheng Cheng, whom they claimed was Muslim, and took her body away. But the Shariah Court later declared that she was not a Muslim.

Malaysia has also been rocked by anti-Christian and anti-Chinese sentiments these past few months, with right-wing Malay group Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma) calling Chinese "trespassers" and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) hosting a forum that demonised Christianity last month.

On January 2, a Jais team had raided the offices of The Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) in Damansara Kim and seized over 300 copies of the Bup Kudus and Alkitab under the Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988.

The Bibles had yet to be returned although Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail had said the Jais had erred in seizing the Bibles from the BSM and ordered the case closed. – June 14, 2014.

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