

Turning back refugees fails much-touted 'shariah index', says Wan Azizah

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By Anisah Shukry

In refusing to take in the Myanmar and Bangladeshi refugees dying at sea, Malaysia has failed its own "shariah index" before it is even implemented, opposition leader Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail told the Dewan Rakyat today.

She said the "protection of life" is the second aspect outlined in the Malaysian Shariah Index that Putrajaya launched in February, yet Malaysia was acting as if the lives of the migrants were worthless.

"Every moment we delay, we are neglecting human lives. The government said it wants to set up a 'shariah index' based on the maqasid shariah, which it launched, but is it meaningless?" she said when debating the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (Amendment) Bill 2015.

"Right now, we are dragging our feet over a matter that involves thousands of lives, when protection of life is the second highest aspect in the maqasid. The index hasn't even been implemented, and we have already failed."

On February 10, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the index, a product that complements Islamic governance through a more comprehensive shariah requirement yardstick, Bernama reported.

The national news agency said the index was the first of its kind ever developed in the world and assessed the government's seriousness in achieving five aspects as required by the shariah: the protection of religion, the protection of life, protection of the mind, protection of the race, and protection of property.

Dr Wan Azizah today urged the government to begin discussions with other Asean countries on how to resolve the crisis currently unfolding at sea.

She said there was no point being the chair of Asean and a member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council if Malaysia did not act and ignored international obligations.

"The government is obligated to uphold basic human rights and provide them with protection, to avoid an even worse disaster at the Andaman Sea," said the Permatang Pauh MP.

She added that Malaysia should accept UNHCR's offer to provide medical and technical aid, and appealed to the UN to provide resources to the country so that it could shelter the refugees as a temporary measure.

"I appeal to the UN in the cost and funding of opening and operating the camps for these refugees," said Dr Wan Azizah.

Yesterday, UN said pushing back the migrants to sea after giving them provisions is incomprehensive and inhumane.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said he was appalled at reports that Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia had been pushing boats full of migrants back out to sea, which he added would inevitably lead to many avoidable deaths.

On Sunday, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon said that he was "increasingly concerned" about the plight of migrants and refugees stranded in the Andaman Sea and Strait of Malacca.

UN had also pleaded for countries in the region to keep their borders open and help rescue those stranded. – May 19, 2015

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