

Zaid: Fear of local Taliban makes politicians remain silent

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Former minister says political leaders have a shallow knowledge of Islam so they are fearful of PAS and the conservative ulama in UMNO who are strong supporters of child marriage.

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian leaders and politicians do not support sound laws and decisions, such as banning child marriages, because they are afraid of the local Taliban, says Zaid Ibrahim.

He says in his latest blog post: "If we were led by truly capable Muslim leaders, it would not be difficult to stipulate the minimum age of marriage to be 18, with an allowance for those at 16 if they possess exceptional mental and psychological maturity to maintain a relationship.

"But we can't do this because we have shallow and timid Muslim politicians fearful of the Taliban who would surely oppose such a move."

The DAP member regretted that some people heaped praise on the recently passed Sexual Offences Against Children Bill 2017 but were totally silent about the government allowing child marriages to continue.

"Isn't permitting a child of 13 or 14 to marry a sexual and psychological violation of the child? Why then is child marriage not an offence against the child under the new law?"

"The answer lies in the fear of a 'Taliban uprising' if we have laws prohibiting child marriage. Our political leaders have a rudimentary and shallow knowledge of Islam so they are fearful of PAS and the conservative ulama in Umno who are strong supporters of child marriage. Naturally, keeping quiet is the preferred route."

Zaid said he was proud of his compatriot Teo Nie Ching, the member of Parliament for Kulai, who has been relentless in seeking a ban on child marriage as part of overall child protection reform.

"Of course, there are many who do not want to enter the fray and support the DAP parliamentarian even though they know child marriage is wrong. They once again allow themselves to become victims of the local Taliban. "Fearful of being pounced on and accused of being anti-Islam, these 'leaders' prefer to remain silent."

The former de factor law minister said PAS's Rantau Panjang MP Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff had told Teo she had no business talking about Islamic law.

"This is the usual method of trying to silence MPs so they don't talk about anything the Taliban disagree with. What PAS and other Muslim NGOs must understand is this simple fact: laws are made in Parliament or in state legislative assemblies, which means elected members are entitled to speak about any law they like. They are not only entitled to do this – the people expect them to do so.

"There has never been a Parliament in Saudi Arabia, so perhaps the MP from Rantau Panjang does not understand how the system works."

Zaid said he agreed with the view of more progressive Muslims that modern societies should not allow young girls to be married except under exceptional circumstances.

Turning to the Quran to support his argument, Zaid said Surah An-Nisa 4:6 did not prescribe any age for marriage.

"It reads in part, 'And test the orphans [in their abilities] until they reach marriageable age. Then if you perceive in them sound judgement, release their property to them'. The conditions for marriage are, therefore, two-fold: one is that it should take place after puberty and two is that the person must have reached a level of maturity and sound judgement in order to manage herself, her property and her home."

He said because of this fear of being labelled anti-Islam by the local Taliban there were situations where the Shariah Court gave permission for old men to marry 12 or 13 year old girls and BN MPs seemingly supporting rape, so long as the rapist married the victim.

"What has become of this country? This is not what a modern Muslim country should practise. Look at countries like Tunisia and Morocco. They are Muslim countries too, yet they have laws like other modern democracies for women and children."

Zaid said Islam needed a new approach in Malaysia but that this would not happen under the present government.

"Before we can have capable Muslim leaders to lead the nation, it looks like DAP members must start the ball rolling and continue to speak in Parliament on matters that are important to women and children, regardless of how much scorn they can pour on us," he added.

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