

### 'The Shi'a Muslims of Malaysia' by Muhammad Haji

Shi'a Muslims face various restrictions on their ability to practice their faith, originating from a fatwa that was issued in 1996 that described Shi'ism as a deviation from Islam.

#### Key Points

- There are up to 250,000 Shi'a Muslims in Malaysia.
- Despite the Malaysian Constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion, Shi'a Muslims face various restrictions on their ability to practice their faith, originating from a fatwa that was issued in 1996 that described Shi'ism as a deviation from Islam.
- The fatwa, currently enforced in 11 out of the 14 states in Malaysia, determines that Muslims in Malaysia are to only follow the teachings of Islam based on Sunni Islam, whilst prohibiting the publishing, broadcasting and distribution of resources opposed to the beliefs of this sect.
- Shi'as have been placed under the Internal Security Act (ISA), which warrants detention without trial.
- States have been actively urged to implement the 1996 fatwa and outlaw Shi'a Islam. State religious authorities are empowered by the National Fatwa Council to act against individuals or organizations preaching Shi'ism.

States in Malaysia have been urged to outlaw Shi'a Islam

#### Media

- In July 2013, the Bahasa Malaysia media raised the issue of a Shi'a threat to Islam and Muslims in Malaysia for a period of three weeks, through misinformation about the sect.
- Other media outlets have presented the situation in a more balanced fashion, highlighting the validity of Shi'a Islam as a fifth school of thought.

#### Fatwa Enforcement

- There are 14 federal states in Malaysia. To date, 11 states have incorporated the 1996 fatwa into their own state Islamic laws.
- The fatwa is enforced in different ways, depending on the state.
- For example, Shi'a Muslims in Negeri Sembilan are free to practice their faith, but are not permitted to spread their beliefs and practices.
- However, in Perak, provisions are made within the law to arrest Shi'a Muslims who have in their possession Shi'a Islamic literature.
- On August 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, the Islamic Affairs Department warned individuals involved with the spread of Shi'a Islam with prosecution in civil court, through the Control and Restrictions of Non-Islamic Religions Bill and the Syariah Criminal Offences Fatwa.

#### Examples

- In 1997, seven Shi'a followers were detained for preaching Shi'a Islamic teachings. Some were released early under the precondition of renouncing their Shi'a faith and reverting to Sunni Islam.
- Six Shi'a followers were arrested under the ISA between October 2000 and January 2001.
- In a mass arrest in December 2010, religious authorities entered the Ali al-Ridha Islamic Centre in Seri Gombak, and detained 200 Shi'a Muslims, on accusations of threatening national security.

In December 2013, the Director General of Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development described Shia Islam as a cancer that should be prevented from spreading.

- In September 2013, four Shi'a Muslims were arrested in the state of Perak. A media report for that month confirmed that in total, 16 Shi'a Muslims had been detained, whilst 120 inspections in connection with those identified with the preaching of Shi'a Islam had been carried out.
- Mosques across Malaysia have been instructed by state religious authorities to deliver anti-Shi'a Friday prayer sermons, consisting of false information about the Shi'a sect of Islam.
- In December 2013, the Director-General of Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development

described Shi'a Islam as a cancer that is to be prevented from spreading.

- In February 2014, three Shi'a Muslims charged with violating the 1996 fatwa were released on technical grounds. Their case is one of several others that have raised concerns among Shi'a Muslims in Malaysia that they are not freely allowed to practice their faith.
- In March 2014, 114 followers of Shi'a Islam were arrested during celebrations to commemorate the birth anniversary of one of the sect's most highly revered individuals.

#### For the full report and further information:

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