

# Malaysia: Songkran isn't the problem; politicising culture is

Monday 14 April 2025, by [RASHID Syerleena Abdul](#) (Date first published: 11 April 2025).

**As a Muslim and elected MP for Bukit Bendera - where the Songkran Music Festival is slated to be held - I find it necessary to speak up against Penang Pas' sudden urge to "protect public morality" by banning a longstanding cultural celebration.**

Penang has long stood as a beacon of multicultural harmony, where diverse traditions are not just acknowledged but celebrated.

The Songkran festival, rooted in Thai and Siamese heritage, has been an integral part of our local festivities for decades. Historically, this event has been observed with joy and camaraderie, devoid of any incidents that would warrant concern.

Notably, temples such as Wat Chayamangkalaram and Wat Buppharam - both located in Pulau Tikus, a state constituency within the parliamentary constituency of Bukit Bendera - have been central to these celebrations, drawing participants from various backgrounds who come together in the true Malaysian spirit of unity.

The Songkran event in Penang is not an affront to Islam or to any religion. It is a cultural festivity that contributes to our tourism, supports our local economy and brings communities together. It has never posed a problem in the past, and it should not suddenly be painted as controversial now - unless, of course, the controversy is politically manufactured.

Penang Pas' move to label the Songkran festival as "indecent" is not just misplaced - it is deeply irresponsible and politically transparent.

For decades, Songkran has been celebrated peacefully in Penang, embraced by our Thai and Siamese communities and enjoyed by Penangites of all backgrounds. There has never been a question of morality - only of culture, tradition and togetherness.

What is especially concerning is the glaring contradiction from Pas itself. While Penang Pas claims the moral high ground, its counterpart in Kedah - under the same party - recently supported and even promoted Songkran as part of the state's tourism strategy.

In April 2024, the Kedah state government proudly collaborated with local communities to host a state-level Songkran celebration, recognising its cultural and economic value.

So which is it? Is Songkran a meaningful cultural celebration or suddenly a moral threat - depending on the political optics? This inconsistency reveals a dangerous pattern: exploiting cultural issues to provoke division and score political points. It is not about values - it is about control.

To my fellow Muslims, I say this: we do not strengthen our faith by suppressing the rights of others. We strengthen our faith by embodying the beauty, wisdom and moderation that Islam teaches us.

Islam calls on us to be just and compassionate and to always speak truth to power.

Misusing religion to gain political mileage at the expense of peaceful co-existence is a betrayal of these values.

If there are genuine concerns about conduct at public events, then let us work together to ensure they are managed appropriately - not by cancelling the event, but by enforcing responsible guidelines.

Malaysia's strength lies in its diversity. Our multicultural landscape is a testament to the beauty of different communities coexisting peacefully.

Targeting cultural celebrations like Songkran not only infringes upon the rights of our fellow citizens but also contradicts the very essence of what it means to be Malaysian.

Penang belongs to all of us. Let us be proud of our differences - and never ashamed to celebrate them.

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