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## ***Expert: Majority rule cannot ignore rights of minorities***

By: Llew Ann Phang (Sun, 09 Dec 2007)

**KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 9):** Democracy may equate to the rule by the majority but it also provides safeguards for the rights of minority groups, said Federal Constitutional expert and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) law lecturer Prof Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi.

Speaking at the discussion, "When Faith Meets Law", during the Bar Council's Festival of Rights, Shad shared his thoughts with the 200 lawyers, members of the public and activists who participated in today's event to celebrate International Human Rights Day tomorrow (Monday).

He said that while it was difficult for different parties to agree on human rights issues, it remained crucial that these rights were respected.

"This includes respect for people's right to autonomy. People have the right to be wrong and I think the law should not necessarily interfere with the wrongness unless it is harmful to people," he said.

"And there are lesser punitive ways of correcting misconduct than putting people in jail," he said.

Malaysian Hindu Sangam representative Datuk A. Vaithialingam highlighted the grievances faced by the Hindus, including the recent demolition of the Sri Maha Mariaman temple in Shah Alam.

"The present law for Hindus is good but its implementation is questionable," he said.

"The Hindu Sangam has problems accommodating these requests [for the relocation of temples] as the community regards the temple sites as sacrosanct.

"In the Shah Alam case, there was no satisfactory notice for the act," he said.

He added that the Hindus also faced problems with religious conversions.

Malaysian Christian Federation chairman Bishop Paul Tan said law and religion were intimately linked in efforts to uphold justice, despite each having its respective domain.

"Laws must not infringe on the rights of [people] who profess different faiths and in dispute, we should go back to the source – the Federal Constitution – through the right channels," he said.

The half-day festival at the Bar Council building also featured poetry-reading, performances by artists and children's activities.

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