The Star

Fadhlina grilled over guidelines

By ZAKIAH KOYA

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PETALING JAYA: A day after the start of the Palestine Solidarity Week, Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek put up the ministry's guidelines calling for a balanced perspective of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, sparking a heated debate online.

On Monday night, the minister posted the dos and don'ts of the controversial programme that is slated to run from Oct 29 to Nov 3 on her social media accounts.

By 6.30pm yesterday, the post on social media platform X, accompanied by the infographic of the guidelines, had been viewed over one million times, with more than 1,300 likes. It was also reposted 776 times with 752 comments.

Last Thursday, the ministry had announced that all educational institutions under its purview – including schools, vocational and matriculation colleges and teacher training institutes – would be holding Palestine Solidarity Week aimed at educating children about values such as human rights, harmony and universal peace.Among the commenters, Mohd Fahmi Ismail @ Fahmi_Ismail wrote:

"The Palestine Solidarity Week is ending soon, why are you only giving the poster of guidelines on Monday?"

Social media users also questioned if the "don'ts" that included the need for a balanced perspective meant that the organisers should also support Israel's attack on Palestine.

The guidelines for the Palestine Solidarity Week came following the urging of restraint by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim over the activities for the programme.

Last Friday, photos and videos of students and teachers of a school, believed to be in Pahang, brandishing toy firearms while wearing the Palestine kefiyyeh (headscarves) and balaclavas went viral, raising widespread alarm over how schools were to hold the Palestine Solidarity Week without any guidelines.

The event had taken place outside of the ministry's official Palestine Solidarity Week.

Following the incident, Fadhlina had said the use of replica weapons, icons and symbols in a confrontational manner was strictly prohibited.

“The Education Ministry will not compromise on any activity displaying forms of extremism, radicalism or violence, while the use of replica weapons, icons and symbols in a provocative and confrontational manner is strictly prohibited according to the guidelines,” she said in a video posted on her Facebook last Friday.

Fadhlina said the Education Ministry was aware of public concern regarding such incidents, adding that the programmes in question did not follow the ministry’s guidelines.

The directive has been met with strong objection, especially in Sabah and Sarawak, with various political and religious leaders as well as non-governmental organisations expressing worries of exposing schoolchildren to sentiments of hatred against other races and religions.

They also called on the government not to set a precedent for such events in schools, which should be kept as a neutral and inclusive environment for all to gain knowledge and cultivate good values.