

Kee withdraws suggestion to rename road

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PENANG, Mon. — State Culture, Arts and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Kee Phaik Cheen today withdrew her suggestion to rename Jalan Mesjid Kapitan Keling to Lebuah Harmoni (Street of Harmony).

"I am sorry that my suggestion has caused a lot of anxiety among the people. I apologise," she told reporters here.

Kee said she suggested the name change to reflect the uniqueness of the street, on which four houses of worship were located.

On Saturday, Kee said she would propose to the State Executive Council to rename Jalan Mesjid Kapitan Keling to Lebuah Harmoni to reflect the unique existence of the houses of worship — the Kapitan Keling mosque, the Goddess of Mercy temple, the Mahamariamman temple and the St George's Anglican Church.

Today, she reiterated the name change was merely to reflect the uniqueness of the street.

"I am also not disappointed if the people are against my suggestion.

"I just want to stress that the street is unique and one cannot find a similar situation in other parts of the world. Its uniqueness has been a major attraction among the tourists," she told a Press conference to announce a procession of vintage cars here as part of the Malaysian Grand Prix Petronas 2002 promotion.

According to Kee, the street was also testimony that the Government does not prohibit the practice of other religions although Islam was the country's official religion.

In an immediate response to Kee's about-turn, Tanjung Umno division Youth chief Raja Munir Raja Mustapha said she should have been more sensitive on the matter.

"She should have had a dialogue with local community leaders before making her proposal public," he said.

He said the present name of the street was of great significance to Muslims in the area and that the Kapitan Keling mosque was a prominent landmark in Georgetown.

"It is improper to change the road name just to attract tourists," he said.

Raja Munir also said the division had earlier planned to raise their concerns over Kee's suggestion with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Penang Heritage Trust president Dr Choong Sim Poey, said names of streets or places with historical significance should never be changed.

"Names have a historical significance which should not be forgotten. Once you lose a street name, you forget what the street was all about," he said.

Dr Choong suggested that a book be written with more details on street names in vernacular languages.

In the context of Georgetown's bid at getting inscribed on the prestigious United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's World Heritage List, he said:

"When Unesco looks at World Heritage listing, they will also be looking at efforts of the Government and local people in recognising the historical significance of historical places, and street names are definitely one of these efforts."