

Religious rows: DAP seeks dialogue with PM
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DAP is seeking a dialogue session with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to discuss the sensitive issue of religion.

Speaking at a press conference in the Parliament lobby today, party supremo and opposition leader Lim Kit Siang said DAP will try to arrange the dialogue as soon as possible.

"Last week, we (DAP MPs) sent a memorandum to the prime minister but have not received any response. We are looking forward to the dialogue which we hope will bring quick resolutions to sensitive cases," he added.

The veteran politician also referred to two recent cases, involving rubber tapper P Marimuthu and self-professed Hindu mother M Revathi.

Earlier this month, religious authorities took away Marimuthu's wife and five children on the grounds that the woman was a Muslim. They are currently housed in a separate village in Kuala Selangor.

Meanwhile, Revathi has been placed under detention for Islamic rehabilitation. The Malacca Syariah Court yesterday extended her 100-day rehabilitation period for another 80 days.

On April 6, it was reported that religious authorities had also seized her 15-month-old baby and the child is now in the custody of Revathi's Muslim mother.

Human approach

According to Lim, during the first few decades after independence people were free to renounce their religion and embrace any religion of their choice, but the situation has changed now.

"The Marimuthu and Revathi cases are like a benign form of the Internal Security Act," he said.

"This is not good for national goodwill and the country's image. Our image as a tolerant country will be questioned," he added.

Lim also said the preparation of a habeas corpus application, to challenge unlawful detentions, in relation to Marimuthu's case was in its final stages.

DAP Wanita chief Chong Eng, who was also present at the press conference, said she will move an emergency motion in Parliament next week to urge the government to end such incidents.

"Revathi's family is separated from her because the Malacca religious department is treating her as a Muslim even though she has announced that she prefers to be a Hindu and has never practised Islam. This is a very inhumane thing to do," said the Bukit Mertajam MP.

"Her choice of religion is not respected. The action to separate her from her family can break a family institution and disturb harmony in our multiracial country," she added.

Chong called on the authorities not to only approach such issues in a legal context but also adopt a human approach as they are dealing with humans.

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