

DAP: BN's religious freedom is only 'skin deep'
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The BN's claims of "religious freedom" and "BN's fairness" is only skin deep, says DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua today.

"It is hence completely hypocritical for Johor Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman to call PAS extremists, and to claim that a vote for BN is a vote for moderation when it is clear that Umno today represents the voice of the religious and racial extremist," said the Petaling Jaya Utara MP in a statement from Labis, Johor.

Pua (right) countered the ruling party's Tenang by-election campaign strategy to scare away Chinese voter support from the PAS candidate Normala Sudirman saying that it was instead PAS who has demonstrated itself as a moderate voice in Islam.

Unlike BN, said Pua, PAS was not against the Christians' use of the term 'Allah' in their Malay texts, and supported interfaith dialogues to promote religious understanding and harmony.

"Najib should personally ask the non-Muslim community if there is genuine 'religious freedom' under BN's rule before proudly declaring 'BN's fairness'," he said of the PM's statements during the recent Thaipusam celebrations.

The opposition MP said that Najib's statements were "skin deep" because even today, "written and unwritten restrictions are placed on the various religions in the country".

He noted the various thorny religious issues that have cropped up under BN's rule, from the 'Allah' row to the 'growing list' of conversion-custody cases.

"If Najib truly believes in 'freedom of religion', he must immediately instruct the Home Affairs Minister Hishamuddin Hussein to retract the government's appeal against the December 2009 High Court decision to permit the use of the term 'Allah' by the non-Muslim community," he said.

Pua pointed out that no such prohibition exists even in predominantly Muslim Middle East countries and that the term had been in use amongst Christians and Sikhs for centuries, yet the BN government has chosen to "unreasonably restrict the religious practices of non-Muslims" by pressing ahead with the appeal.

Whither interfaith panel?

He said that rather than practice what they preached, the BN government has "repeatedly postponed" interfaith initiatives and said it reflected "the degree of intolerance among certain religious leaders in Malaysia, including a petty dispute over the name of the sub-committee."

If Najib truly believe in the "freedom of religion", he must urgently form an inter-faith panel to openly discuss critical issues affecting religious harmony in the country.

"The BN government has repeatedly postponed the inter-faith meetings which reflect the degree of intolerance among certain religious leaders in Malaysia, including a petty dispute over the name of the sub-committee," said Pua.

He pointed out that it was Umno who were the extremists, citing the violent demonstrations over religious issues such as the infamous 'cow's head' protest over a Hindu temple in Shah Alam on the pretext that the temple was in a Muslim majority area.

"(Home Minister) Hishamuddin even held a meeting with the protestors in a show of support for them," said Pua.

Pakatan on the other hand, said Pua, were the first to convene an interfaith dialogue, that took place in February 2010 attended by over 100 religious leaders from all faiths.

DAP leaders are currently in Tenang for the by-election for the Johor state seat, campaigning for PAS candidate Normala Sudirman.

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