

Agong orders Penang mosque panel polls put off

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The Penang Islamic Affairs Council's (MAIPP) move to get local Muslim communities around the 200 mosques in the state to elect their own mosque committees has been put off in a sudden twist of events.

The decision was made at a meeting at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur today, where the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Abdul Rahman Abbas and MAIPP head Ellias Zakaria met with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

The annual general meetings in 151 out of 200 mosques within the state, planned for tomorrow and Sunday, will therefore be postponed until further notice.

The state exco incharge of Islamic religious affairs, Abdul Malik Abul Kassim, said today the King made the decision to 'withhold' the election after the meeting with Abdul Rahman and Ellias.

Several groups have shot down the new procedure under which mosque committee members would no longer be selected by MAIPP but elected directly by their congregations.

Abdul Malik, who is Batu Maung assemblyperson, said he was informed of the decision in a telephone call from the MAIPP'office.

"We will make an official announcement after MAIPP's meeting on Monday," he said. "We will then have to decide whether to proceed or to cancel the election all together."

Since MAIPP introduced the election on June 6, several groups have shot down the new procedure, under which mosque committee members would no longer be selected by MAIPP but elected directly by their congregations.

Umno has been in the frontline of the protest, accusing the DAP of interfering in the Islamic affairs of the state, even though the party has no representative in MAIPP.

Umno also hit out at the state government for intending to split the Muslim community and allow politics to seep into the congregations, which Abdul Malik has vehemently denied, saying open elections would keep politics out.

Umno and Muslim NGOs have strongly criticised MAIPP for insulting the Yang di-Pertuan Agong by not seeking his His Majesty's approval before implementing the new mosque committee election system in the state.

However, the state government has maintained that the new procedure complies with the rules and regulations of MAIPP.

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