

Hindu Sangam to bring conversion grievances to PM
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The Malaysia Hindu Sangam (MHS) has decried the alleged involvement of staff from a local college in Perlis together with officials of the state Islamic affairs department (JAIP) in the conversion of an Indian student to Islam.

In a statement issued yesterday, MHS president RS Mohan Shah expressed shock that three lecturers of the college had a hand in the conversion of the female student, when they should have been focused on their students' "development of knowledge, skills and talent".

"It is disappointing, therefore, to note that these staff members getting involved in religious conversion of students when they should, in fact, safeguard the religious, cultural and social interests of their students to ensure unity, peace and harmony among students in these multiracial institutions of higher education," said Mohan Shah.

According to Mohan, the lecturers and JAIP officials failed to "follow the rules." When confronted on the matter, the lecturers concerned said "they were not aware of the rules", he added.

"MHS takes a serious view of this incident and will bring this matter to the attention of the minister of higher education and also to the prime minister for necessary action," he said Mohan Shah.

His remarks come in the wake of another public controversy over religion in Selangor, which saw a social welfare group Harapan Komuniti going at loggerheads against the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (Jais) after an event organised by the former was 'visited' by Jais officials over claims that Muslims in attendance therein were subject to missionary efforts.

The incident re-opened old wounds over Christian missionary efforts and Malay sensitivities, on the one hand, and grievances over the comparatively open hand and state support that Islamic religious authorities have to promote Islam amongst non-Malays.

Mohan Shah cited the cases of Hindus living in poverty being "taken advantage of" by the religious authorities and coaxed into converting to Islam.

"Many conversion cases have been brought to the notice of MHS involving converts who were not provided or equipped with proper knowledge about conversion and were misguided into signing conversion documents.

"Without proper knowledge and guidance, many of these converts have brought a host of problems not only for themselves but also misery to their family members," he said.

Mohan Shah also insisted that conversions be carried out in a transparent manner and based on proper knowledge, guidance and carried out with the consent of the converts' family members, especially in the case of children, young people and people lacking maturity and awareness.