

**PAS on the brink over anti-apostasy**  
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COMMENT The meeting today of the central leadership of PAS is perhaps its most important one going into the 13th general election.

This is because the party will have to decide whether to support or to dissuade its members from making common cause with the Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Gathering of a Million), an anti-apostasy rally scheduled for this Saturday at the Shah Alam Stadium.

Signs that the gathering is accruing into an anti-Christian assembly have already drawn frowns from two of the party's stalwarts in Selangor. That is a good thing.

But reservations are not enough; a firm stance against the rally is what is required of the party's central leadership.

NONEThere are compelling reasons for PAS to decline support for Himpunan.

Coming as it does after Parliament was told there is no basis for action against assorted Christian groups which allegedly plotted in Penang last May to dethrone Islam as the federation's official religion, Himpunan will be seen by non-Muslims as yet another factitious attempt to paper over splits in the facade of Malay political unity with a show of religious unity.

Unity is a good thing but if it is projected against straw targets and bogeys, it is delusional and dangerous.

We have it on record that there was no Christian plot to dethrone Islam in Penang. Further, no proof is yet available that there was Christian proselytisation of Muslims at a charity dinner held at the Damansara Utama Methodist Church centre last August.

Therefore two of the most recent occasions for rumour-and-fear mongering at the expense of Christians have turned out to be examples of unjustified hysteria.

Hence a decision today by PAS to remain neutral or worse to support the gathering would be read by those who are drawn to the party's rallying slogan of recent years - 'PAS For All' - as political gimmickry rather than a serious attempt to foster broad understanding for Islam's universalist ideals.

pkrtaman ehsan selayang ceramah 020810 hasan aliObservers will note that the party dodged an opportunity to carpet its maverick Selangor state executive councillor, Dr Hasan Ali (right), who jumped the gun last August by coming out and saying that there was Christian proselytisation of Muslims at the charity dinner held at DUMC.

Till today there have been no solid grounds to prefer such an accusation but Hasan still maintains his leap-before-you-find stance of last August.

So much for the behaviour of a senior official of a party whose espousal of a judicial system in which the verification of evidence, given the terminal finality of the punishments it could mete out, is of paramount importance.

Conscientious objection

There is another reason why PAS should opt for conscientious objection to Himpunan.

In bringing up recently the issue of hudud in Kelantan, the party has created confusion in the minds of those it wants to win over through its rallying slogan of 'PAS For All.'

Very few non-Muslims know as fact that support for syariah is obligatory for Muslims. (Let's leave aside the reality that many Muslims are themselves unimpressed with the fact that they are obliged to support the imposition of syariah.)

When non-Muslims, as a minority in Malaysia, come to realise that their objection to the imposition of syariah on Muslims is futile, they plausibly would come round to being neutral about it, provided it is imposed only on Muslims.

In that eventuality, the only insurance against the permanence of a judicial system that citizens may well find insupportable would be the inviolability of their right to vote every four or five years for a new dispensation.

PAS is a democratic party so that any attempt to nullify that right will have not only to run the gauntlet of resistance from within but also from the broad populace.

In the interests of a creative politics, in quest of freeing Malaysians from the stultifying mystifications that race and religion have exerted on our citizenry, PAS has today to set it face against Himpunan.

And begin the journey of giving refreshed meaning to the universalist ideals of the religion they are pledged to uphold.