

Stir over naming of new Islamic council head

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A controversy is silently brewing in Penang over the appointment of the state Islamic Religious Council (MAIPP) president, which has been due since Jan 1.

Penang executive councillor for Muslim religious affairs Abdul Malik Abul Kassim said the name of the new president has been submitted to the Agung for His Majesty's decision.

"The power to appoint is in the Agung's hands and we are now awaiting His Majesty's decision," he told a press conference in Komtar today.

NONEBut speculation is rife that Abdul Malik's (right) name has been nominated to head the council, much to the chagrin of his opponents in Umno.

When told that the matter was raised by an Umno leader, the Batu Maung assemblyperson shot back, "I want to question how did Umno get this information which as far as I know is a secret?"

"The decision has not been announced publicly yet. Whether the information you just told me is right or wrong, I will not comment.

Let the palace decide, then I will comment," he added.

Abdul Malik urged his adversaries in Umno and BN to be fair and sensitive when dealing with such controversies.

He added that as a party which had been in government with BN, Umno should not be stirring trouble over the issue.

"It is not that they have not been in government. They are in government too (at federal level), how can they act like this?" he queried.

"I really want to throw back this question at them: How can palace business be leaked out to a third party?" he asked.

"Please respect the decision and name of the person who has been listed and sent to the Agung for his decision. We have followed the proper process," he stressed.

PAS riled up as well?

It is learnt that the speculation has also riled up PAS, a Pakatan Rakyat ally, who was promised the president's position in MAIPP way back in 2010.

Pakatan had then wanted state PAS commissioner Salleh Man to assume the post after the term of the previous president, Shahbudin Yahaya, expired in December 2009.

But the coalition, which took over the Penang government in 2008, had to abide by the Agung's decision to appoint former Universiti Sains Malaysia lecturer Elias Zakaria.

Meanwhile, Abdul Malik was also told that several NGOs are concerned that the appointment of the heads of religious bodies like MAIPP and the Penang Hindu Endowment Board are "too politicised".

"Whether the appointment is political or not is a matter of interpretation," he said.

“Can you say someone is apolitical just because he is in an NGO? He may be an NGO leader but he is political and may have political inclinations,” he added.

Abdul Malik said knowledge in Islam is important in the appointment of religious scholars (imam).

However, for administrative positions like the president of MAIPP, “We do not really need someone with so much religious background”.

Pakatan’s leadership in MAIPP under Abdul Malik, who is also state PKR vice-chief, has courted several controversies since the political tsunami of 2008.

Last year, the palace had to intervene and halt MAIPP’s introduction of mosque committee elections in Penang, following intense opposition from Umno.

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