

Walk your talk, interfaith group tells Najib
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The government has been chided by an interfaith group for condoning the Johor Education Department seminar for Islamic studies teachers today that focuses on Christian proselytising.

Alarmed by the event, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) issued a impassioned plea to Prime Minister Najib Razak:

"We implore you to walk your talk. Be the leader of a responsible government that practises what it preaches. Your concept of 1Malaysia and your call for moderation is all in disarray."

The seminar was originally titled 'Pemantapan Aqidah, Bahaya Liberalisme dan Pluralism Serta Ancaman Kristianisasi Terhadap Umat Islam. Apa Peranan Guru?' (Strengthening the faith, the dangers of liberalism and pluralism and the threat of Christianity against Muslims. What is the role of teachers?).

The reference to Christianity was subsequently removed following public outrage.

The interfaith council noted that Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Muhyiddin Yassin had in February launched a National Interfaith Harmony Week in commemoration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

"He (Muhyiddin) called on all students and teachers to respect and celebrate the different religions practised by our fellow Malaysians under the tenets of 1Malaysia.

"We are shocked that the only voice of the government heard on this matter is that of the minister responsible for Islamic affairs, who is condoning the seminar.

"The irony of the matter is that the same minister serves as one of the advisers to the cabinet committee on the promotion of understanding and harmony among the religions," the council said.

The umbrella group also urged the government to take responsibility for this "serious violation", adding that the efforts put to harness unity have been "meaningless".

Johor Mufti Dept defends seminar

Yesterday, the Johor government re-named the seminar as 'Liberalisme, Pluralisme dan Gejala Murtad: Apa Peranan Guru Di Dalam Mempertahankan Akidah?' (Liberalism, pluralism and apostasy: What is the role of teachers in defending the faith?), saying that its sole purpose was to "strengthen the faith among Muslims".

MCCBCHST also hit out at the silence from non-Muslim component leaders in the ruling coalition who had pledged to protect the rights and privileges of the people as enshrined in the constitution.

"Let us remind all leaders of the government that the majority of the rakyat in Malaysia, irrespective of their religious affiliations, would like to live in peace and harmony with one another," it added, urging the government to take urgent remedial measures.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that the Johor Mufti Department had defended the seminar, which was held today.

According to the department, the seminar was aimed at advising teachers of Islamic education on the importance of ensuring that young Muslims had strong faith in the religion.

It did not at all belittle other religions as claimed by certain quarters, said Johor Mufti Department head of the fatwa (edict) division, Suhaimi Rebu.

He spoke to reporters after the seminar, held at the seminar hall of the Johor Education Department in Johor Baru.

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