

Bishop lauds call to PM to end 'deafening silence'

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By Terence Netto

Bishop Dr Paul Tan Chee Ing praised an interfaith group for urging Prime Minister Najib Razak to end what the head of the Catholic Church in the Melaka-Johor diocese said was the "PM's deafening silence" on pressing issues concerning inter-religious harmony.

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) had yesterday urged Najib to be "the leader of a responsible government that practices what it preaches."

The call came as Christian NGOs and religious leaders remonstrated with the government over an education seminar in Johor yesterday that had for its theme the implication that Christian proselytisation of Muslims had reached ominous levels in Malaysia.

NONEAs a consequence, the Johor education department altered the initial theme of the seminar to one that was less provocative.

Bishop Paul Tan (left), who is president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, had been skeptical of the value of Najib's penchant for hosting of luncheons for leaders of non-Muslim religions under a patina of fostering inter-religious harmony and dialogue.

"Those were delusive occasions giving rise to pious platitudes to the value of inter-religious harmony because every time a religious issue sparked in the national arena, the people who should show the most leadership turned out to be the most craven in a crisis," said the bishop.

The Jesuit-trained prelate was one of the founders of the MCCBCHST in 1984. Since its formation, the interfaith council has become the leading voice for the protection of religious liberty of non-Muslims in Malaysia.

"While we should not spurn the hand of friendship and hospitality offered by the political authority, we at the same time should not encourage them in the delusion that pious intentions are an adequate substitute for urgent action," asserted Bishop Paul Tan.

PM must match deed to word

He said by calling upon the PM to match deed to word on the "synthetic issue of Christian proselytisation of Muslims", the MCCBCHST was "bearing witness to the plain truth that ordinary Malaysians of various religions are tolerant of each other's beliefs despite the inflammatory machinations of frustrated politicians."

NONE"Why should it be so difficult for those who mean well to say to those who mean ill that the latter are out of order?" asked Bishop Paul Tan.

"I'm glad the MCCBCHST has decided to tell the prime minister that the image he wants to foster as an exponent of moderation is under threat from his apparent passivity in the face of those who plainly mean ill," he asserted.

"It's hypocrisy for the PM to run with the hares while at the same time allowing religious hounds to hunt at will," said Bishop Paul Tan.

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