BN MPs told to vote with conscience on conversion bill
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By Susan Loone

A Penang Gerakan leader has urged MPs from the BN to search their hearts and vote with their conscience on the bill to amend the Federal Territories law relating to the conversion of minors to Islam, which he described as morally wrong.

NONEThe party's state legal and human rights bureau chief Baljit Singh (left) expressed deep disappointment over the matter, saying the bill was proposed without prior consultation with BN component parties, including Gerakan.

"This confirms the impression that only one party rules in the BN," Baljit told Malaysiakini, referring to Umno, whose members are Malay Muslims, as the prime mover of the amendment.

"You cannot put the cart before the horse. Consultation with various sectors must be done before proposing the bill to amend the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) Enactment in Parliament," he stressed.

Baljit was responding to the tabling of the controversial bill, which appears set to proceed in Parliament.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Jamil Khir Baharom said all MPs would be briefed before the second reading of the bill.

Legal action mulled

The controversial amendment to the Federal Territories Islamic law, which seeks to give just one parent the right to convert a minor to Islam, has been criticised widely, even by Umno partners within the ruling coalition.

Baljit said such a law, if allowed to proceed, could be abused as it was not fair to allow one parent to decide the faith of a child when both parents are responsible for the child's welfare.

"Why not let the child decide when she or he comes of age?" he asked.

NONEBaljit backed his colleague, Kedah Gerakan Youth chief Tan Keng Liang (right), who threatened to file legal action against the government if Parliament passes the amendment.

The amendment will made to Section 107(b) of the Administration of Islamic Law (Federal Territories) Act to allow one parent to convert an underaged child to Islam.

Tan, in his declaration yesterday, said Article 12 (2) of the federal constitution should be defended at all times, especially since the proposed amendment "goes against the spirit of the federal constitution".

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