

MCA, MIC, Gerakan get earful on church protests

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"You are a disgrace to your own community!" said Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng today.

He was castigating BN's three major non-Muslim component parties - MCA, MIC and Gerakan - for blindly supporting and working with Selangor Umno despite the latter's racism.

Selangor Umno, which threatened mega demonstrations against Christians last week, said Lim, "spouts racial hatred against non-Malays and disparages the religious rights of non-Muslims".

Although the Umno division eventually backed down from their threat to hold protests outside Catholic churches statewide during Sunday prayers, Malay groups aligned with Umno were adamant to proceed.

"For the first time, there will be demonstrations outside churches on Sunday when prayers are conducted," said the DAP secretary general in a statement this morning.

"This deliberate heightening of tensions between different faiths by Umno is a clear attempt to divert attention away from livelihood problems faced by the rakyat caused by BN's price hikes in sugar, petrol, power and highway tolls causing a chain reaction of price hikes for other essential services," he added.

Lim condemned the three BN component parties for condoning Umno's acts of playing such racial games.

"Umno must be made to realise that a majority of Malaysians are not amused by them playing the fires of religious hatred in using the 'Allah' issue to pit Muslims against non-Muslims, Malays against non-Malays," said Lim, who is also Bagan MP.

Sunday drama in Klang

The controversy exploded just two days after a massive 10,000 strong rally in Kuala Lumpur occupied the New Year's Eve celebrations, protesting against a year of past and impending price hikes.

On Jan 2 Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) showed up at the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) without a warrant and raided the office, seizing over 300 copies of Malay and Iban language bibles and detaining two of its staff.

Following public outrage over the raid, Selangor Umno countered by calling for rallies outside the state's churches, particularly the Lady of Lourdes Church in Klang but aborted it after police warned them against it.

A group aligned to Umno, the Solidariti Ummah Klang, persisted and eventually held their protest at a nearby field, demanding that Christians conform to a government ban that prevents them from using the word 'Allah', which they say is exclusive for Muslims.

Despite Selangor Umno chief Noh Omar banning his members from attending, they nevertheless showed up at the field this morning along with other Malay lobbyists Jati and Pekida.

Meanwhile another group of about 40, mostly Muslim, including Marina Mahathir, former premier Mahathir Mohammad's daughter, turned up in solidarity with the Christians in front of the Lady of Lourdes Church.

Diverting attention from price hikes?

Prime Minister Najib Razak has so far remained silent and has been criticised by the Opposition and civil society alike for allowing religious tension to escalate to divert the nation from rising cost of living.

Lim recalled that a majority of Malaysians, including Malays and Muslims, defeated the BN in terms of popular vote for the first time by giving Pakatan a majority 51 percent support in the last general election.

"It is gratifying to see the growing number of Malays and Muslims opposed to the unprecedented and abominable raid by religious police on the Bible Society of Malaysia," he added.

"Where are the fundamental constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and the spirit of Prime Minister Najib Razak's 1Malaysia when Islamic religious authorities can prosecute and act against non-Muslims?" asked Lim.

"Worse, Malaysians feel betrayed when Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, instead of playing the peacemaker chose to pour oil into the fire by sanctioning the right of Muslim groups to demonstrate outside churches on Sundays," Lim said.

"Whilst BN seeks to divide and split the unity of the people, ordinary Malaysians want to address our national problems together in a spirit of common national heritage and citizenry," he added.

Lim said DAP is confident that Malaysians will opt to choose for religious harmony and mutual respect as well as racial cohesion and coexistence over the disreputable demonstrations, discrimination and dichotomy of BN.

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