

Gerakan says stop the fuss over open pork sales

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Penang Gerakan has described the open sale of pork in several locations in the state as a "non-issue", saying the business has been in place even when the party was in power, pre-2008.

"It is nothing new. It's more an issue of health and cleanliness, and sometimes involves planning (areas to conduct the business)," said Gerakan national legal and human rights bureau chief Baljit Singh.

"There is no reason to ban it," the lawyer told Malaysiakini.

While agreeing that the Penang Municipal Council (MPPP) should act firmly against illegal hawkers, Baljit (left) said that the law should apply across the board, regardless of race or religion of the culprits.

On the alleged sensitivities of the matter, Baljit said this depends on the individual, to each its own, and is beyond control.

Baljit reminded that the act of slaying a cow during Hari Raya Aidiladha may also hurt the sensitivities of Hindu who deem it a "sacred or holy animal".

Buddhists or vegetarians may also oppose to this act as they are against violence or killing of a life, he added.

He stressed that keeping calm, while others serve beef or meat, which Hindus, Buddhists or vegetarians avoid for religious or health reasons during public functions, is also another example of how the different communities have managed such sensitivities.

Tolerance survives despite constant battering

"We live in a multiracial country, most of us have managed to exercise tolerance and keep our sensitivities in check because we want to maintain peace and racial harmony," Baljit reminded.

"I hope we do not come to a point where we make rules or impose punishments to prevent hawkers from legally selling the meat," Baljit added.

"I hope and hope, that certain quarters will stop raising such issues or make a big fuss about it," he pleaded.

Baljit said most Malaysians, from all walks of life, ethnic or religious groups do not see this as an issue.

"Only certain people who are looking for some political mileage would like to make up this issue. Let's us move on and forget about this," Baljit urged.

He was referring to the Islamic Solidarity and Charity Organisation (Isco) memorandum to MPPP complaining about pork being sold openly in public areas like Chulia Street, Kuantan Road and CY Choy Road.

The group of seven, led by the NGO's president Abdul Rahman Makhtun handed over the letter to Zulfaqr Yakob, a representative of the Penang administration, in Komtar yesterday.

They urged the MPPP to be more sensitive towards the Muslims as pork is "haram" to the community.

CM: Learn from PAS

The group expressed regret, claiming that the MPPP and state government under Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng are not sensitive to the Muslim community, although the latter has consistently denied such allegations when revealing that Penang's allocation for Islamic activities has been boosted under the Pakatan government.

Umno Tanjong division youth wing vice-chief Mohd Yusmadi Mohd Yusof and Isco secretary Mohd Firdaus Humayoon were part of the delegation which submitted the memorandum peacefully yesterday.

Asked to comment on the issue, Lim (right) said that the open sale of pork in certain locations in the island had been the practice since BN days.

"Why didn't they raise it then when former CM Koh Tsu Koon was in power, why do it now?" he asked.

"They should learn from PAS. Even in Kelantan, where the party rules, this is not an issue where the meat is hung up openly for sale," Lim added.

Lim said Umno cannot be trusted, cautioning others not to repeat their statement

as "it can eat you up".

He added that the locations mentioned by the group are pre-dominantly non-Muslim areas, labelling Isco as being "unfair and insensitive" to others when issuing the demands.

When told that the group wanted the meat sold in an enclosed area, Lim retorted "are we supposed to imprison them?"

On the demand for MPPP to act sternly against illegal hawkers, Lim shot back "don't just point at the pork sellers, it should apply to all".

'Issues turned sensitive by Umno'

He pointed out that pro-Umno supporters and NGOs like Perkasa and Pekida had come out strongly to defend illegal hawkers when district offices or MPPP personnel demolished their stalls after the owners refused to adhere to local council rules and regulations.

Meanwhile, DAP national chairperson Karpal Singh said Isco and Umno members should "resist and desist" from exploiting sensitive issues.

Karpal (right) recalled that the open sale of pork existed even during British rule and under the Alliance government, and no one has objected to it.

"The issue is not sensitive, but is turned into one. It is obvious that Umno is exploiting it for political reasons," he said at a press conference today.

"We hope Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will direct Umno members to refrain from turning this into a sensitive issue or to further exploit the matter," he added.

Karpal said such sensitive issues were raised because Umno is "desperate", as the party had minimal support - 10 seats - in Penang.

Nevertheless, exploring racial, religious and sensitive issues for political expediency is wrong, Karpal added.

"Muslims in the state will understand without objection in this issue because they know Umno is just looking for cannon fodder to make it a sensitive issue when it is a non-issue here," he stressed.

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