

**Malaysia a secular state, insists Gerakan**  
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Gerakan has weighed in on its BN partner's claims that Malaysia is an Islamic state, saying it views the country as "fully secular".

The party said it also stands by the cabinet decision made in April 2009 to prohibit unilateral conversion of an underage child.

Gerakan president Mah Siew Keong said that the welfare of children must be given utmost priority and conversion of minors cannot be allowed as an avenue to escape one's parental obligation.

"So we support the decision by the cabinet in April 2009 to prohibit unilateral conversion of the underage child by one parent," stressed Mah after chairing the party central committee meeting today.

At the event the party also circulated a statement stating Gerakan's stand that Malaysia is a "fully functional secular-based constitutional monarchy with Islam as the religion of the federation".

This Monday, a leader from Gerakan's BN partner Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Jamil Khir Baharom caused a stir when he said in Parliament that Malaysia is "not a secular country".

In the statement issued by the Gerakan central committee later, it noted that there were varying views on the secular or Islamic state issue and called the setting up of committee to decide the matter.

It said first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had repeatedly stressed Malaysia was not an Islamic state and there had been court decisions expressing the same opinion.

However, it also noted that Dewan Rakyat speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia had argued that Malaysia was not secular while former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said Malaysia was neither

"In view of such ambiguity and divergence of views on these crucial matters, Gerakan calls for the setting up of a special bipartisan committee comprising experts to seek reconciliation and consensus."

A mechanism needed

It added that the committee should also come up with a mechanism to handle child conversion and custody cases and propose amendment to laws if necessary.

It said any civil marriage should only be dissolved according to civil law and the original religion of the children at the point of the marriage should be given priority as per the 2009 cabinet decision.

Conversion must not be used as an avenue to escape one's obligation, it added.

"The children cannot be allowed to be victims in such irresponsible actions in marital disputes," it said.

It also said that the Malay version of the Federal Constitution prior to 1970 stated that the consent of "ibu-bapa" (mother and father) was needed and not "ibu atau bapa" (mother or father).

"As far as is known, there has been no formal amendment by Parliament to the Malay version of "ibu-bapa" since 1957.

"Hence, we need to ensure that the integrity of the Bahasa Malaysia version of the constitution is defended."

'I will sue, sue, sue'

Meanwhile, Mah threatened to take legal action should the media quote him out of context.

"Don't just use one line out of the context, (if) you print and distort me, I will sue, sue, sue.

"This one, I learned from the 'tokong' (deity) from Penang... But there are many tokongs in Penang, I don't mention anyone's name," he said.

Penang Deputy Chief Minister Mansor Othman had reportedly described Penang Chief Minister and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng as "tokong" at a PKR meeting prior to the 13th general election.

Mah, who is also the newly-elected Teluk Intan MP, specifically asked Malaysiakini not to "inflamm" his remarks.

"Give me a good headline for once, don't go and twist my thing. Can Malaysiakini give me a headline like 'Gerakan calls for consensus and coming together'? You know, (if) you do this, it helps everybody," he said.

He also called on journalists to help lower the political temperature in the country and enjoy the ongoing World Cup matches instead.

"Tomorrow I will buy all the newspapers to read who is helping to enhance the unity of the

country. I tell you honestly, (if you do so) I will send you a present to thank you for helping us.”

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