

DPM: Interfaith panel just 'small fry'
Malaysiakini.com
April 12, 2010
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Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin today moved to placate Muslim concerns that the establishment of the inter-faith panel would undermine the status of Islam.

NONESpeaking to reporters in Sungai Buaya, Hulu Selangor said the panel was made up of "small-fry" and was legally toothless and thus, was no threat to Islam.

"It is just an avenue to allow space for better understanding between religions in the country," Muhyiddin said.

He added that that the body was not a commission and it has no powers to influence the country's policies.

"They are just small fry, (with) a small role played within the Prime Minister Department," he said.

"The committee, which was set up under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Department, may come out with findings that can be capitalised as guidelines to improve communication among various races.

"But it will not touch on the position and status of Islam. We have to respect each other's religion and create the spirit of cooperation," he told reporters.

'Small fry' heads committee

Muhyiddin said this in response to Malay rights pressure group Perkasa's criticism of the panel, which was established under the National Unity and Integration Department, led by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Koh Tsu Koon.

The panel would be headed by former Kota Bharu MP Ilani Isahak and include representatives from the Islamic Development Department, Institute of Islamic Understanding and the Malaysian Consultative Council on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.

Ibrahim argued that the panel should be headed by a prominent Muslim scholar and as it stands, the panel seemingly sidestepped the Rulers Council which is the highest governing body on matters concerning Islam.

Muhyiddin also brushed aside Ibrahim's criticism of Ilani's credentials, adding that the senior lawyer was qualified for the job.

"She has vast experience so let's give her a chance," he said.