

'Did Penang gov't approve Friday sermon?'

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MCA head Dr Chua Soi Lek has made a vain attempt to avoid being dragged into the 'Friday sermon' controversy, allegedly involving several mosques in Penang.

Asked to comment today, he initially said he is not aware whether it is true that Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's name had replaced that of the Agong in the prayers following the sermon.

NONEHowever, Chua then said that, having served four terms as a state exco in Johor, it is his understanding that the Friday sermon must be approved by the state government.

"I must admit that I do not know (about this) and of course what I read is from Utusan Malaysia. But if it is true, it comes as a surprise to me..." he said, without naming anyone as he continued his remarks.

"A far as I know when you read the khutbah (sermon) in the mosque or surau, the text must get the approval of the state religious council.

"So the crux of the matter is: was it approved and what was the purpose of doing that (giving such approval)? For a non-Muslim's name to appear in the khutbah in the mosques, was the name (used) with his consent? (And was) he was aware (of this)?"

Last Thursday, Penang Umno chairperson Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had claimed that the name-switching had occurred at several mosques in Tasek Gelugor, Permatang Pauh and Jelutong..

Lim has denied any involvement in this, also saying that an immediate check has shown that the claim is not true.

'M'sians can't take jokes'

Earlier, Chua had opened the party's seminar for village security and development committee members in Sungai Petani, Kedah.

He did not seem happy with the media presence, saying he could not reveal too much in his speech because of this.

NONEChua delivered a 40 minutes pep talk to some 100 participants from Penang, Kedah and Perlis.

He advised them to step up their standard of services as he has received complaints from the public about poor performance.

He said that, during the Hulu Selangor by-election in Selangor - when he visited villagers to drum up support for BN - he was told that they would have supported the coalition except for the poor performance of village heads.

Chua later took a dig at reporters, especially those based in Penang, for reporting everything he says, even if he means it in jest.

"In Penang, I told the press not to write when I said something as a joke but they wrote everything and got me into trouble," he told a press conference.

"(This happened) when I was (health) minister, they thought I was not serious. Malaysians cannot accept jokes."

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