

Religious status: Legislators want PM to act
Malaysiakini.com
April 5, 2007
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Opposition MPs have highlighted two cases of government intrusion into the lives of two private citizens because of their religious (Muslim) status.

In the first case, a self-professed Hindu woman has had her child taken away from her by the Religious Department as she did not register her marriage to a Hindu.

Siti Fatimah, 29, was born a Muslim to Indian parents. However, she was raised in the Hindu faith by her grandmother, Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam) told a press conference in Parliament today. Also present were Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh (DAP-Bukit Gelugor).

According to Chong Eng (left), Siti changed her name to Revathi Masoosai in 2001 through a letter of admission. After marrying with a Suresh Veerappan, the couple had a child in 2005. The marriage was not registered.

Their problems began when the Malacca Religious Department (Jaim) officers came to claim the child days after the birth.

"Siti refused to leave her child. The Jaim officers left the hospital with a warning that they would take tough action if their demands were not met," said Chong Eng.

In January, the Syariah Court ordered Siti to the Akidah Rehabilitation Centre in Ulu Yam, Selangor where she is to be quarantined until April 18.

'Gracious and merciful God'

On March 26, the officers returned with Siti's mother, a police officer and a lawyer to take away the child.

"All three members of the family have been separated because of religious difference."

"We feel that this should not have happened because each Parliament session begins with a prayer containing the words Allah Maha Pemurah dan Maha Pengasih (Allah is most gracious and merciful)."

"We believe in the principle of not compelling others in Islam and we urge that the relevant authorities practice this principles for the good name of Islam and for the harmony of our multi-racial and multi-religious society," said Chong Eng.

She said such cases were not unique, as exemplified by the R Subashini, M Moorthy, Ramesh and Lina Joy cases that were brought to light through Parliament.

A memorandum endorsed by 12 opposition MPs will be sent to the prime minister urging him to intercede in the matter.

Meanwhile, Lim highlighted another case in Johor where a woman's remains is still

unclaimed by her family members due to a confusion over her Muslim status.

Tang Siew Ying, 81, passed away in Segamat Hospital on Monday. Lim said the four children were left surprised when they discovered that her IC card bore an 'alias Azizah Abdullah'.

"The family is not allowed to claim the body until now," said Lim, adding that the body still remains at the hospital.

He said that this was because officers from the religious authorities were unable to verify as to whether she was a practising Muslim.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/65559>