

Selangor Sultan says intervened to avoid politicisation of church raid row
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 11 — Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah has said that he moved to end the controversy over state religious authorities' August raid on a church for alleged proselytising to ensure the issue was not politicised.

The Selangor ruler said in an interview published by Utusan Malaysia today that if he had asked Mentri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim to handle it, "people would have politicised the issue and made the situation worse."

"After several weeks, we said that it would not be ideal if the issue was allowed to drag on. So, I said I would resolve it as the head of Islam," the sultan of the Pakatan Rakyat-governed state said.

Sultan Sharafuddin ruled on October 10 that the raid on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) on August 3 was legitimate. — file pic
After controversy had raged between the Selangor Islamic Religious department (Jais), Christians and politicians for two months, Sultan Sharafuddin ruled on October 10 that the raid on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) on August 3 was legitimate.

But he said that although religious enforcers found evidence of attempts to subvert Muslims, it was "insufficient" for further legal action and therefore no one would be prosecuted while Jais would provide counselling to the Muslims who were present at the church during the raid.

The contentious raid had escalated religious conflict between Muslims and Christians in the country, with Malay newspapers highlighting allegations of Christians trying to convert Muslims through welfare work.

The Selangor government recently met Jais and representatives from NGO Harapan Komuniti — which organised the dinner at DUMC — in a bid to resolve the debacle that has incensed Muslims and Christians against the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) administration.

Harapan Komuniti — which helps AIDS patients and impoverished single mothers — has said it featured prayers, religious songs and a quiz on Islam at its dinner, but denied it was proselytising.

The Sultan said today he was saddened that Malays were angry at his decision.

"We feel sad as they should defend me, not criticise me. Religion is a very sensitive issue," he said.

Outspoken law professor Abdul Aziz Bari was suspended by the International Islamic University (UIA) in October for reportedly calling the Selangor ruler's intervention in the raid "unusual and inconsistent."

Aziz's statement caused a furore among Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs in Parliament, who urged that action be taken against the don.

But hundreds of UIA students gathered at the university's Gombak campus in October to demand the lecturer's reinstatement.

Aziz's colleagues and lecturers from other universities as well as opposition leaders have also backed the academic.

He has chosen not to apologise even after a police report was lodged against him, insisting he had not meant to challenge the Sultan and was only fulfilling his role as an academic.

Both UIA and police are investigating the constitutional law expert over his remarks.

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