

Selangor forms panel in bid to resolve church raid row

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By Clara Chooi

SHAH ALAM, Aug 22 — The Selangor government announced today the formation of a syura advisory council comprising Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim and state Mufti Datuk Setia Mohd Tamyas Abd Wahid in a bid to end the raging debate over the recent raid on a church.

Khalid said the idea for the consultative council had come from the Selangor Sultan during a meeting held last week.

In Islamic terms, "syura" refers to a meeting, consultation or discussion held among a group of religious scholars and Muslims on matters pertaining to the welfare of their faith and loyalty towards Allah.

"I appreciate His Majesty's advice that we should find the best way to resolve this issue in a prudent and satisfactory manner," Khalid said in the statement released by the state secretariat this afternoon.

Apart from Khalid and Mohd Tamyas, council members will also include the latter's deputy, Datuk Abdul Majid Omar.

The Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) entered the spotlight earlier this month when it raided the Damansara Utama Methodist Church's (DUMC) rented premises in Petaling Jaya during a dinner function.

The incident drew condemnation from lawmakers and Christian leaders, re-igniting a religious tension that the Najib administration has been struggling to quell since the recent "Allah" row.

Jais denied, however, that it had raided the church, insisting instead that it had merely conducted an inspection to investigate a complaint that Muslims were present during the function.

Selangor state executive councillor Datuk Hassan Ali also backed the department, claiming that proof of proselytisation had been found and pointing out that such activities were prohibited under the law.

The Selangor government has since ordered a probe into the incident and urged for calm, but pro-government newspapers continued filling their pages with claims of purported attempts by Christian organisations to convert impoverished Muslims by offering charity.

Khalid said today the Syura council will be tasked with compiling information from Jais and Harapan Komuniti, the organiser of the dinner function held at DUMC on the night of the raid.

He added that, if necessary, the council may also summon DUMC officials and the 12 Muslims who were at the function, to have their statements recorded.

"The council will listen and study Jais' report thoroughly on the incident as well as examine all the information, proof and video recording of the inspection.

"The Selangor government's priority is to ensure that every aspect of its administration obeys the principles of justice, transparency, good governance and integrity," he said.

Apart from the church raid, Khalid said the council will also review issues plaguing both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Selangor.

"This is to draw up guidelines to ensure respect and harmony among the different races and religions are preserved. The Selangor government reiterates its readiness to discuss and dialogue to protect the peace and harmony that have long existed in our diverse community," the statement said.

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