

Don't stir up hornet's nest, Selangor PAS warns Himpun organisers
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 17 — Selangor PAS wants the organisers of the planned gathering of a million Muslims to guarantee that the event will not be abused to incite religious tension between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun), or Gathering of a Million Faithful, is being organised by various right-wing groups such as Perkasa with the backing of both Umno and PAS Youth in what appears to be a coming together of conservative Muslims.

The planned rally against Christians "challenging the sovereignty of Islam" this Saturday could raise religious tension that has intensified in recent months after allegations of proselytism of Muslims by Christians.

Today, Selangor PAS deputy commissioner Khalid Samad said his party was "worried" about the true purpose of the gathering, and stressed that it should focus on addressing real threats faced by Muslims instead of pitting the country's main religions against one another.

"We are not happy with the noticeable trends and directions (of the gathering). We want an assurance that it will not be used to incite religious, racial tension," he told The Malaysian Insider.

The Shah Alam MP added that Selangor PAS has not decided whether to take part in the event.

"We've not said yes, we've not said no. We've set some conditions in which we will agree to participate — [such as] if the gathering truly focuses on problems affecting the Muslim faith, and not blaming another faith," said Khalid.

He said Selangor PAS will make a decision in a few days' time, and that the national leadership will also discuss the matter during the party's political bureau meeting tomorrow night.

About 1,000 Facebook users have confirmed their attendance to the event

With ethnic tensions already rising in the years following the 2008 general election, it could raise already simmering fears of growing Islamisation among non-Muslims and more liberal Malays.

In a video promoting the gathering, Himpun said "There is no other choice but to rally Muslims".

Distrust between Muslims and Christians peaked when the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) raided the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) in Petaling Jaya on August 3, claiming there was ongoing proselytisation of Muslims.

This came after repeated disputes between Christians and Muslims, such as the legal battle over the use of the word Allah to refer to the Christian god.

A December 31, 2009 court ruling allowing the Catholic Church to use the term Allah in its newspaper had led to places of worship being firebombed in January last year.

The government also buckled under pressure and ordered the release of Malay-language bibles seized before Sarawakians, half of whom are Christians, voted in the April 16 state polls.

Before the Jais raid, Umno's Utusan Malaysia and Malay rights lobby Perkasa accused the DAP of conspiring to turn Malaysia into a Christian state.

Although DUMC has denied Jais' claims, Utusan Malaysia fanned the flames with allegations that Christian groups in Kuala Lumpur and Johor were actively trying to convert Muslims.

Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah appeared to close the case last week when decreeing that although Jais had found evidence of attempts to subvert Muslims, it was "insufficient" for further legal action.

But Himpun has insisted on following through with its plans to "measure the level of unity and spirit of togetherness among Muslims especially towards Christianisation efforts including the August 3 incident."

Recent years have seen communal politics being stirred up after the landmark Election 2008 — the stiffest contest in Malaysian history.

With Barisan Nasional (BN) losing its customary two-thirds hold on Parliament and five state governments, several political leaders have retreated into racial silos to drum up support.

A Merdeka Center poll in June found that only 66 per cent of respondents said ethnic relations were "good" — a 15 per cent decline from the 78 per cent who said so five years ago.

The opinion researchers also found that just over a third believed that there was "sincere and friendly ethnic unity," down from 54 per cent five years ago.

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