

PAS opts out of Himpun to keep it apolitical
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 — PAS will skip Saturday's gathering to protest against Christians "challenging the sovereignty" of Islam, a move that placates its non-Muslim partners in Pakatan Rakyat (PR) but ruffles its own party conservatives.

PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang however claimed the decision, made by the party's political bureau during a meeting last night, was to avoid turning the protest political.

"PAS was informed that the event does not involve any political party so PAS has decided not to participate, out of respect for the organisers' wishes," Hadi (picture) said in a statement issued here.

The decision contradicts the stand of PAS's youth wing which had yesterday pledged to offer the same support it had given to Bersih 2.0 during its rally for free and fair elections on July 9.

PAS Youth chief Nasrudin Hassan had said in a statement that wing members would come out in full force to attend the gathering and expressed hope it would achieve its goals.

However, last night's political bureau decision effectively overrides Nasrudin's announcement.

The decision will also likely help PAS avoid further conflict from its non-Muslim partners in Pakatan Rakyat.

The Islamist party and DAP are said to be still smarting from their recent disagreement over the controversial hudud law, a squabble that resulted in a deadlock decision that both parties would "agree to disagree".

This Saturday's gathering, known as Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun) or Gathering of a Million Faithful, is organised by various right-wing religious groups and is said to have the backing of both Umno and PAS Youth leaders.

Christian leaders have spoken out against the purpose of the rally, which is to protest alleged acts of proselytisation by Christians, pointing out that no concrete proof has yet been found.

The rally was mooted after the controversial raid on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) on August 3 where it was alleged that Christians were proselytising to Muslims there.

Despite deciding against his party's participation however, Hadi urged all those attending the event to act within the confines of the law in order to protect national harmony.

"Any effort to create a racial or religious polemic will lead the country into a situation that

benefits no one," he warned.

"PAS views seriously any attempt by any party to try and use this event as an opportunity for politics or for the coming elections."

The Marang MP expressed PAS's full support for efforts by NGOs to strengthen the Islamic faith but said their objectives must be sincere and handled carefully.

He said the strengthening of Islam must be done "peacefully", adding that the religion was accepted into the community through peaceful means.

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