

**Non-Muslims can gather too, say Umno MPs**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 20 — Umno lawmakers said that non-Muslims are free to gather their believers, while dismissing fears that a planned rally of a million Muslims against Christians “challenging the sovereignty of Islam” this Saturday will heighten already tense inter-faith relations.

MPs from the ruling party told The Malaysian Insider today that such rallies were an extension of a freedom of speech, despite claims that the Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun) or Gathering of a Million Faithful, is a show of strength by various right-wing groups such as Perkasa.

“NGOs from other religions can gather too. It is up to them to organise it,” Deputy Education Minister Datuk Puad Zarkashi (picture) said.

Kinabatangan MP Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin agreed, saying that “non-Muslims can gather as well, so long as it is not in the streets,” referring to the July 9 Bersih street rally for free and fair elections which was outlawed by the government.

Christian leaders have labelled Himpun’s fight against proselytisation “irrelevant” and cautioned the group against provoking religious tension by going ahead with the rally.

Umno’s partners in the ruling Barisan Nasional, MCA and Gerakan, have also called on Himpun to cancel the rally as it will harm race and religious relations.

PAS has said that the gathering should remain apolitical while PKR insists there is no threat from Christians.

“I support it. I think PAS and PKR Muslims should support it too if they really want to defend the faith because it is non-partisan,” Puad, who is Batu Pahat MP, added.

“Everyone can assemble. This is the start of liberalisation where we can speak and understand each other better. The problem now is a lot of us are ignorant about other faiths,” said Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Himpun has called on Muslims to rally against Christians “challenging the sovereignty of Islam” this Saturday on the back of alleged proselytising by Christians.

A large crowd at the Shah Alam Stadium this weekend could push Umno and PAS to seek relevance among more religious Malays and raise already simmering fears of Islamisation among non-Muslims and more liberal Malays.

But Bung insisted the event would not be a show of strength as “there won’t be any speeches attacking other religions. It is just a gathering to unite and strengthen Muslims.”

Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan also said the gathering will not disturb the

peace as it is being held in a stadium.

"We are a tolerant country. As long as it is held in a safe place, it won't hurt race relations," the deputy minister in the prime minister's department said.

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