

PAS MP, priest deride Christian charity conversion report
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 — A PAS lawmaker and a Catholic priest both spoke out today against the latest news linking church charity groups to covert conversions, calling it another a ploy to pit Muslims against Christians.

Kuala Selangor MP Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad suggested it was it was a political move calculated to claw back the support of Malay-Muslim voters ahead of the 13th general election, expected to be called by year-end.

“You see it now, they are full of plots,” the PAS central working committee (CWC) member told *The Malaysian Insider* in an immediate reaction to the allegations following a Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) raid on the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) in Petaling Jaya last Wednesday night.

He stressed that both Jais and Selangor executive councillor in charge of Islamic affairs Datuk Hasan Ali must explain and clarify the allegations. Hasan who is also member of the PAS CWC is to meet the panel tomorrow and the Islamist party is to make its official stand after that.

“PAS wants proper action later to be compliant to the Federal Constitution,” Dzulkefly added.

Earlier today, Umno-owned *Berita Harian* and its sister newspaper *Harian Metro* had accused certain Christian groups of buying over Muslims in an attempt to swell their ranks by offering cash, free food and housing to poverty-stricken Malays.

Rev Father Michael Chua dismissed the allegations as old news, saying the stories about mass conversions of Muslims as well as the entry of large numbers of “priests” or “pastors” brought in intentionally for this purpose have repeatedly surfaced within the Muslim community.

“Past allegations have never been substantiated by any proof or evidence. I believe that such rumours are often used to frighten Muslims and to create hostility against Christians,” said the Catholic Church’s ecclesiastical assistant in charge of ecumenical and inter-religious affairs in the Kuala Lumpur area.

“[But] This is the first time I’m hearing of a ‘priest’ training programme involving former Muslims as alleged by the two persons interviewed in the Malay dailies,” he told *The Malaysian Insider*.

Chua urged the relevant authorities to investigate the claims made by both Malay dailies which cited from witnesses nabbed by Jais and the police during the DUMC raid.

According to witness accounts as reported by the two newspapers, they embraced Christianity after attending talks by Christian evangelists from east Malaysia and Indonesia and being given copies of the Bible in Bahasa Malaysia besides listening to Christian religious tapes.

“Given the sensitive nature of this issue, I believe the matter should not be left to ‘trial by media’ as the sensationalising of this issue would only result in reinforcing lies, half truths and prejudices,” the Catholic priest said.

In the latest census results released a few months ago by the Statistics Department, Malays, who are constitutionally Muslim, make up the biggest race and religious group nationwide at 61.3 per cent. In comparison, Christians form only 9.2 per cent of Malaysia's 28.3 million population.

The reports by *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro* come three months after another Umno-owned daily, *Utusan Malaysia*, frontpaged a report headlined "Kristian agama rasmi?" ("Christianity the official religion?") based entirely on the words of a handful of pro-Umno bloggers claiming a secret pact to install a Christian instead of a Muslim as prime minister and oust Islam as the religion of the federation.

Putrajaya's severe actions in limiting the import of the Alkitab, the Malay-language version of the Bible, from Indonesia plus delays in moving forward the legal tussle over the use of the word "Allah" to also refer to the Christian god has stirred anger among the community, especially in east Malaysia, long considered the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government's vote bank.

The allegations by BN-controlled media that depict Christians as working hand-in-glove with communist insurgents and opposition politicians to topple the government of the day and supplant it with a Christian prime minister have stirred a storm of protests that saw thousands take to the streets in a public rally organised by electoral reform group Bersih 2.0 on July 9.

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