

PKR calls 'zakat abusers' obstructers not defenders of Islam
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 13 — PKR stepped up pressure on Islamic affairs minister Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom today, accusing him and two senior Federal Territories Islamic Religious Council (MAIWP) officials of standing in the way of Islamic law rather than defending its sovereignty.

One of the officials, MAIWP director Datuk Che Mat Che Ali, had yesterday insisted the trio used zakat funds to pay for their legal fees to "defend the sovereignty and honour" of Islam.

PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution (picture) poured scorn on Che Mat's remarks today, insisting "they are not defending the sovereignty of Islamic institutions but blocking Islamic law from being executed."

This comes on the back of another minister, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, being forced to take three weeks' leave yesterday due to continued attacks from PKR over the RM250 million National Feedlot Centre (NFC) project awarded to her family.

The women, family and community development minister has faced calls to quit from within Umno including from influential former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Saifuddin said in a statement today the trio were sued in their personal capacity for blocking the qazaf case from being heard in court.

"What is their excuse for using zakat money to defend themselves when sued when they were the ones who stopped the qazaf case from being brought to justice?"

"Is using your position to stop a person who has been defamed from bringing a case to the Syariah Court considered defending the sovereignty of Islamic institutions?" the Machang MP asked.

PKR has repeatedly accused the Jamil Khir, Che Mat and MAIWP chief prosecutor Shahsuddin Hussain of abusing RM63,650 in alms money to cover legal costs after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim named them as respondents in his 2010 qazaf application in the Syariah Court.

PKR de facto leader Anwar had filed an application in January 2010 to compel Shahsuddin to prosecute his former aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan after he declined to proceed with the qazaf case.

His application is set to be heard on January 30. The opposition leader named Jamil Khir, Che Mat and Shahsuddin as respondents.

Saifuddin said today it was "shocking" that the lawyer used by the trio, Zainur Rijal, was appointed a member of the MAIWP on July 25, 2011 given that the council is in charge of appointing judges for syariah cases including Anwar's qazaf appeal at the end of the month.

Che Mat had also denied the trio had abused RM63,650 in zakat funds as the MAIWP commingled both alms money and funds from the government in the same account.

"We can pay for the legal fees to defend the sovereignty, honour, dignity and credibility of MAIWP with zakat," he said, referring to a statement by Federal Territories Mufti Datuk Wan Zahidi Wan Teh on Wednesday who said that it was in accordance with Islam.

He explained that given his role as secretary of the MAIWP and Jamil Khir's as MAIWP chairman, it was not wrong to use MAIWP funds to pay for legal fees incurred when Anwar sued them.

PKR lodged a police report yesterday against the minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Che Mat and Shamsuddin after revealing to the media documents it says proves the trio abused zakat funds.

PKR communications director Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad had distributed on Wednesday copies of a letter by Auditor-General Tan Sri Ambrin Buang to PAC chairman Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid dated November 21, 2011, confirming that RM63,650 of zakat funds was used to settle the trio's legal fees.

In Ambrin's investigation report attached to the letter, the A-G confirmed that Che Mat had first approved an interim payment of RM31,500 from MAIWP's "general resource allocation for legal services" on January 28, 2010.

"This payment was approved on February 9, 2010, through voucher No. 2010B01304, to use zakat allocation first as the government grant was yet to be received," Ambrin wrote in his report.

When denying the allegations on December 31 last year, Jamil Khir had insisted that he had paid his qazaf legal fees through a RM700,000 special fund allocated by Putrajaya and did not use zakat funds but made no reference to allegations that the alms money was first used to settle the fees.

PKR has pointed out that Ambrin's report shows the money was replaced only in December, six months after it was used and the trio's act of advancing money from the zakat fund to settle their personal legal fees violated the Penal Code.

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