

Walk the talk, PM, says interfaith group
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 31 — The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) has called on Datuk Seri Najib Razak to practice what he preaches after Johor education and religious authorities decided to carry on with today's seminar for religious schoolteachers on "the threat of Christianisation."

The interfaith group said in a statement that the prime minister's 1 Malaysia concept for unity and moderation is in "disarray" following news that the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration in Johor will only drop the reference to Christianity in the seminar's theme but not change its content.

"We implore you to walk your talk. Be the leader of a responsible government that practises what it preaches. Your concept of 1 Malaysia and your call for moderation is all in disarray," the council said.

News of the seminar's theme earlier this week drew swift condemnation from non-Muslims, who expressed shock and dismay over the characterisation of Christians in the title.

But Muslim NGOs insisted that the government was duty-bound to address the "threat of Christianisation," which they repeatedly profess to be real despite the absence of firm evidence.

In response, Johor dropped specific mention of the "Christian threat" from the seminar originally themed "Pemantapan Aqidah, Bahaya Liberalisme dan Pluralism Serta Ancaman Kristianisasi Terhadap Umat Islam. Apa Peranan Guru?" (Strengthening the Faith, the Dangers of Liberalism and Pluralism and the Threat of Christianity towards Muslims. What is the Role of Teachers?).

"The seminar aims to strengthen the faith of Muslims and it does not need to be politicised by any party that claims it (seminar) is a threat to other religions," Datuk Maulizan Bujang, the state executive councillor for education, was quoted by Bernama Online.

But Johor Mufti Department officials have said that while the title of the seminar, which requires attendance of about 300 teachers, will be changed, the contents and structure will remain unaltered.

"The seminar is part of the right of Muslims to defend the faith of its practitioners from any action which may lead to apostasy. It is our responsibility," Bernama Online cited an unnamed official as saying.

MCCBCHST added that the seminar has put efforts to increase unity "meaningless."

"We are shocked that the only voice of the government heard on this matter is that of the minister responsible for Islamic affairs, who is condoning the seminar.

"The irony of the matter is that the same minister serves as one of the advisers to the cabinet committee on the promotion of understanding and harmony among the religions.

Christians form 9.2 per cent of Malaysia's 28.3 million-strong population.

In recent years, the Christian and Muslim religious communities have been engaged in a tug-of-war over the word "Allah", with the latter group arguing that its use should be exclusive to them on the grounds that Islam is monotheistic and the word "Allah" denotes the Muslim god.

Christians, however, have argued that "Allah" is an Arabic word that has been used by those of other religious beliefs, including the Jews, in reference to God in many other parts of the world, notably in Arab nations and Indonesia.

Conservative Muslim groups have also accused Christians of attempting to convert Malays, resulting in heightened tension between followers of the two religions.

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