

**Church council asks Christian ministers to raise Johor seminar in Cabinet**  
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**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 1 — Malaysia's top church council has urged Christian ministers to bring up the Johor seminar issue in Cabinet so the issue can be put to rest in a manner that would show Putrajaya's commitment to inter-religious harmony.

The Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM) said Christian ministers should use their office to ensure Cabinet takes a stand on yesterday's seminar for Johor's religious teachers, which was originally centred on the "threat of Christianisation" to Islam.

Christian members of Cabinet include Datuk Seri Idris Jala, Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili, Datuk Seri Peter Chin and Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

"They should be doing their part... Such topics are uncalled for in the official education system.

"The issue is not resolved even though as far as the government is concerned it is resolved," CCM secretary-general Rev Dr Hermen Shastri (picture) told The Malaysian Insider.

He said it was "sad and alarming" that teachers were receiving training on such topics, which he cautioned would breed more suspicion and intolerance between Malaysians of different religions.

CCM president Rev Thomas Philips urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to commit to his 1 Malaysia concept, which promotes unity, and "censure" the Johor education department for organising the seminar.

"All we are asking is that he lay down his rules and say 'I believe in 1 Malaysia' and not encourage people to cause these kind of distractions..."

"Is it only rhetoric and a political gimmick where here you say one thing and then another thing somewhere else?" he said.

Philips, who is also vice president of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), added that Najib must make a "bold statement" on the issue if it was good for the nation.

"We believe in freedom of speech... but I think when it is out in the open that one group is organising an event to attack another group, it puts people on the defensive," he said.

Some 300 religious teachers from Johor national schools attended the seminar entitled "Strengthening the Faith: What is the Role of Teachers?" which was held in the state capital yesterday.

The seminar had attracted controversy among non-Muslims earlier for focusing on the

alleged threat of Christianisation to Islam.

Its original title — "Strengthening the Faith: The Dangers of Liberalism and Pluralism and the Threat of Christianity towards Muslims. What is the Role of Teachers?" — was changed after much outcry from non-Muslim religious groups.

The seminar was organised by the state education department and the office of the Johor Mufti to ensure that Muslims will not be "confused" by alleged bids to convert them.

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