

**Christian threat remains despite seminar name switch, says Perkasa**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 31 — The Johor government was forced to bow down to “political pressure” in amending the title of a controversial seminar on the “threat of Christianisation”, Perkasa has said.

The Malay rights group played down the decision of the Johor state education and state mufti department to amend the seminar title, saying it did not change the fact that the “Christian threat” was real.

“Even though the seminar title for this Saturday has been changed and there is no longer the word ‘threat of Christianisation’, this will be discussed and debated in the seminar.

“Perkasa understands there are some who were unhappy with the original title but they have to admit that there is a genuine ‘threat of Christianisation’ for Muslims in this country, don’t deny it,” Perkasa secretary-general Syed Hassan Syed Ali told The Malaysian Insider.

The Perkasa leader said his group was “unhappy” with the title change but was also aware that this could have been due to political pressure.

Syed Hassan questioned why organisations like the Bar Council did not defend the state government’s right to organise such seminars, and accused of being hypocrites for their silence in the matter.

“Where is the Bar Council in this? Don’t let it only be due to a political agenda for them to defend the right of expression,” Syed Hassan added.

The organisers of the criticised seminar on “the threat of Christianisation” for Johor religious schoolteachers have amended the event’s theme following outrage from the non-Muslim community, Bernama Online reported yesterday.

The seminar, initially 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?), will now omit specific mention of the “Christian threat”.

“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 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.

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.

The Cabinet's interfaith panel head Datuk Azman Amin Hassan said the "provocatively-titled" seminar flies in the face of the government's school-level interfaith harmony week launched last month by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

He added that while "it is fine to improve your faith", such seminars "will cause the [non-Muslim] community to feel uncomfortable."

The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) also demanded the government explain why official sanction was given to the "highly inflammatory" seminar.

Muslim groups, however, have insisted the seminar is necessary to beat back the alleged threat of proselytism, which they repeatedly profess to be real despite the absence of firm evidence.

The Muslim Organisations in Defence of Islam (PEMBELA) today insisted the seminar and its theme were part of Muslim rights that were "enshrined in the Federal Constitution".

Malay rights group Perkasa previously said it would consider the seminar's organisers "cowardly Muslims" if they gave in to pressure to amend the provocative title.

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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