

Johor Mufti: 'Christian threat' seminar to help religious teaching
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JOHOR BARU, March 31 — The Johor Mufti defended today his seminar on the "threat of Christianisation", saying it was for the good of teaching Islam.

The Star cited Datuk M. Tahrir Kiai Samsudin as telling about 300 religious teachers at this morning's seminar, which has drawn criticism from non-Muslim groups, that the event was not tied to any political party or ideology.

The seminar was attended by teachers from Pasir Gudang, Johor Baru, Kulaijaya and Pontian and conducted by Ustaz Rashidy Jamil Muhammad Al-Rashid at the state education department here.

The newspaper also reported that the seminar compared verses from the Bible and Qur'an.

News of the seminar organised by the Johor Mufti and Education Departments broke earlier this week and 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.

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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