

Ongkili to raise 'Christian threat' seminar in Cabinet
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 — A Christian minister has said he will seek an explanation in the Cabinet on why teachers in Johor were required to attend the state government's seminar on the "threat of Christianisation."

Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili told The Malaysian Insider he will ask Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who holds the education portfolio and hails from the southern state, to explain why the seminar, organised by the state's education and mufti departments, was allowed.

"I will raise it in Cabinet with Tan Sri education minister and ask why they organised this when this 'threat' is only an allegation," the science, technology and innovation minister said.

Malaysia's top church council had on Sunday urged Christian ministers to bring up the 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 the Cabinet takes a stand on last Saturday's seminar after Datuk Seri Najib Razak called for all religions to respect other faiths but did not censure the seminar despite calls from non-Muslim groups for him to "walk your talk" of unity and moderation.

CCM president Rev Thomas Philips also urged the prime minister to commit to his 1 Malaysia concept, which promotes unity, and "censure" the Johor Education Department for organising the seminar.

Christian members of Cabinet include Ongkili (picture), Datuk Seri Idris Jala, Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas, Datuk Seri Peter Chin and Tan Sri Bernard Dompok.

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 Johor Baru yesterday.

The seminar had attracted controversy among non-Muslims earlier for focusing on the alleged threat of Christianisation to Islam.

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?).

But Johor Mufti Department officials said that while the title of the seminar will be changed, the contents and structure will remain unaltered.

The Mufti Datuk M. Tahrir Kiai Samsudin also insisted the seminar was for the good of teaching Islam.

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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