

Make Kit Siang your president, Dr M tells PAS
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By Shannon Teoh

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 29 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad challenged PAS today to appoint DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang as its president after a lawmaker from the Islamist party said it was ready to accept Christian leaders.

The former Umno president, who tussled with PAS over Islamic issues during his 22 years in power, told reporters "there is nothing wrong with this as Kit Siang will surely protect Islam and give allocation for mosques."

"They used to call us kafir (unbelievers) but now they want non-Muslim leaders," the former prime minister said, referring to PAS's criticisms of Umno for working with other parties in Barisan Nasional (BN) such as MCA and MIC.

"Now they are not only co-operating (with non-Muslims), they want non-Muslim leaders. They should make Lim Kit Siang their president. After all he is a very patriotic Malaysian," he said of the veteran DAP leader who led the opposition during most of Dr Mahathir's time in power.

PAS research chief Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said yesterday the party is ready to accept non-Muslims in positions as senior as deputy president.

The Kuala Selangor MP said the party was prepared to emulate Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which appointed Coptic Christian intellectual Rafiq Habib as its vice president last year.

The PAS central committee member said such a move was not against Islam and is "only an administrative matter" that is allowed because "Islam can address change for intellectual renewal. Islam can withstand the challenge of time."

Tensions between Muslims and Christians have resulted in Islamic NGOs going on a nationwide roadshow, held under the banner of Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Gathering of a Million Faithful), to rally Muslims against what it terms "the challenge of Christianisation."

Allegations that Christians are trying to convert Muslims peaked last August when the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) raided the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) in Petaling Jaya.

This came after repeated disputes between the two faiths, such as the legal battle over the use of the word "Allah" to refer to the Christian god.

An initial 2009 court ruling allowing the Catholic Church to use the term "Allah" had led to places of worship being firebombed in January 2010.

The government also buckled under pressure and ordered the release of Malay-language bibles seized before Sarawakians, half of whom are Christians, voted in the April 16, 2011 state polls.

Before the JAIS raid, Umno's Utusan Malaysia and Malay rights lobby Perkasa accused the DAP of conspiring to turn Malaysia into a Christian state.

Although DUMC has denied JAIS's claims, Utusan Malaysia fanned the flames with allegations that Christian groups in Kuala Lumpur and Johor were actively trying to convert Muslims.

Dr Mahathir also said today since non-Muslim leaders in the opposition "have become very good at quoting the Quran", they would be able to lead PAS.

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