

New 'Islamic Reforms' Team Under Sultans Makes CEP's Committee Redundant?

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By MT Webmaster

Malay rulers have given their blessing for a new committee comprising former government-linked Muslim officials to study the reforms of Islamic institutions.

(FMT) – Questions have been raised on whether efforts by Putrajaya's top advisory council to reform Islamic institutions in the country will now be redundant, after a similar body comprising former top Islamic officials and academics seen aligned to conservative Muslim groups received the blessing of the Malay rulers.

The rulers recently agreed to the formation of a new special committee called High-level Committee on Federal Institutions of Islamic Affairs, which is aimed at improving federal Islamic institutions in the country.

The committee is made up of five members, led by former chief secretary to the government, Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, alongside two academics and two former top Islamic officials.

The two academics in the committee are Afifi al-Akiti, a Muslim scholar close to the Perak royal family and currently attached to the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and Mohd Kamal Hassan, former rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia.

Ahmad Sarji was also the chairman of the government's Institute of Islamic Understanding (Ikim), which was launched by Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1992, during his first term as prime minister.

Two others in the committee are former Johor mufti Noh Gadot and former director-general of the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (Jakim), Wan Mohamad Sheikh Abdul Aziz.

The announcement of the new committee comes on the back of another committee formed under the purview of the five-member Council of Eminent Persons (CEP), where

several prominent Islamic scholars and activists were tasked with drafting a proposal on reforms of Islamic bodies.

“This could be a sign that conservatives are not going to allow easy passage for reforms of Islamic institutions,” a reliable source told FMT.

The new committee will also be seen as more powerful as it comes directly under the Conference of Malay Rulers, where the office of the Keeper of the Rulers’ Seal will act as its secretariat.

A statement said the decision to form the committee was reached by Malay rulers who met earlier this month, saying it was in line with the status of Islam as stated in Article 3 of the constitution.

It said it would study the jurisdiction of federal Islamic bodies as well as matters related to the administration and powers of the shariah court.

The committee, the statement said, would accept feedback from stakeholders and hold discussions “including with those who voluntarily give their views”.

Over the years, Muslim leaders have questioned state Islamic authorities, especially Jakim, over what is perceived as their penchant for imposing a more rigid form of Islam in the country.

Influential government religious officers have also been blamed for a spate of controversial religious rulings as well as the banning of hundreds of books over the years on the topic of Islam.

Jakim has also come under the microscope, with leaders in both Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Harapan calling for its dismantling, saying its powers are against the constitutional provision that matters of Islam come under the purview of state rulers.

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Sources: <http://www.malaysia-today.net/2018/07/30/new-islamic-reforms-team-under-sultans-makes-ceps-committee-redundant/>