

MB: Mufti briefed group about conversion claims

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KUALA LUMPUR: Perak Mufti Datuk Harussani Zakaria had only informed a group of people at a closed-door meeting at the state mosque of the allegations that some Muslims had converted to Christianity, said Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali.

The Perak Menteri Besar said the objective of the meeting had been to control young people so that they would not go astray.

"But somebody picked up one of the examples given and cited Datuk Azhar Mansor. The Mufti is not involved in the SMS but he might be the reason for the SMS being spread," he said yesterday after attending the Umno pre-council briefing by the party president at PWTC.

A widely circulated SMS caus-

ed quite a furore last week because it alleged that national mariner Datuk Azhar Mansor was an apostate, and would lead a ceremony to baptise a group of students at the Church of Our Lady Lourdes in Ipoh on Nov 5.

This turned out to be false and the supposed baptism was in fact the Holy Communion for 100 Catholic children.

Tajol Rosli said the mufti had explained to reporters on Sunday what had actually taken place.

"It's up to the police to investigate," he said.

Information Minister Datuk Seri Zainuddin Maidin said that many people suspected Harussani had sent the recent offensive SMS because he had previ-

ously made claims of Muslims turning apostates.

He said earlier this year the mufti told a Malay daily that over 100,000 Muslims in the country had converted to other religions.

"So, when the recent SMS surfaced many believed it had come from him," the minister added.

The mufti had claimed then that the number of Muslims who converted was provided to him by a group of professionals and students.

The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (Jakim), later denied the figures, alleging they were obtained through unreliable sources.

Zainuddin said: "The problems that arose from the SMS

and how Harussani was made to look like its sender, should serve as a lesson to all those in senior positions."

He said civil servants in positions of authority should refrain from making statements unless the facts had been verified by the relevant government agencies.

They should be able to distinguish matters that are sensitive in nature, he said, adding that issuing factually wrong statements could lead to public outrage.

Zainuddin said they should not blame the media for running their inaccurate statements because the media would regard them as reliable sources of information.

"The onus is on the govern-

ment officials to make sure that they have all the facts because they have all the resources, including the police, to check if the facts they received are true," he said.

Sisters In Islam programme manager Norhayati Kaprawi said the Perak Mufti should have kept the information of the alleged baptism ceremony to himself if he had doubts about the authenticity and validity of the claims.

"He should have kept the information to himself and submitted it only to the police for further investigation.

"He should not have disseminated the unverified outrageous claims to other Muslim NGOs in a mosque," she said in a statement here yesterday.