

## **2 foreign Christian preachers barred from speaking in Singapore for anti-Islam, anti-Buddhist comments**

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Two foreign Christian preachers recently had their applications to speak in Singapore rejected, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Friday (Sep 8), as the preachers had made "denigrating and inflammatory comments of other religions".

They are required to have a Miscellaneous Work Pass (MWP) to preach in Singapore. In its media release, MHA said that the decision to reject the applications was made by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), in consultation with MHA.

Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam cited the two cases at an Institute of Policy Studies forum earlier on Friday, when he spoke of how Singapore's approach to terrorism should not be seen as a "knee-jerk reaction" to the global terrorist movement.

Mr Shanmugam stated that he did not usually combine the words "Islam" and "terrorism", as terrorism can exist in any religion.

"Just as I have banned Muslim scholars or preachers from coming into Singapore, the most recent banning has been as regards to Christian preachers. They were very Islamophobic in their statements outside of Singapore and we decided that we will ban them," he said.

One of the preachers had described Allah as "a false god", asked for prayers for those "held captive in the darkness of Islam", and referred to Buddhists as "Tohuw people" (a Hebrew word for "lost, lifeless, confused and spiritually barren" individuals) who can be saved only by converting to Christianity, MHA said in its subsequent media release.

The other preacher had variously referred to "the evils of Islam" and "the malevolent nature of Islam and Mohammed", and called Islam "not a religion of peace", "an incredibly confused religion", interested in "world domination" and "a religion based on ... adhering to uncompromising and cruel laws often focused on warfare and virtual slavery", MHA added.

"Such teachings are unacceptable in Singapore's multi-racial, multi-religious society, and the Government will not allow religious preachers of any faith to run down other religions or spread ill-will among the religions," MHA said.

"This is to safeguard the social harmony and cohesion that have been painstakingly built up since Singapore's independence."

A foreigner who wishes to deliver a talk in Singapore that is related to religion, race or politics, is required to obtain an MWP.

In its media release, MHA said that the granting of an MWP was a privilege accorded to a foreigner and not an entitlement.

It added that MOM consults relevant agencies in its assessments of MWP applications and that each application is considered on its own merits.

## **POSSIBLE CHANGES TO LEGISLATION**

During the forum, Mr Shanmugam also said that Singapore was looking to strengthen the Maintenance of the Religious Harmony Act (MRHA).

The minister said Singapore's approach to social inclusion was "fundamental and central to the DNA and the thinking and workings of the Government for the last 50 years".

"We know that if we don't get this right, nothing else will go right," Mr Shanmugam said.

Part of this was a legal framework that enacted strict laws on hate speech, which he said he was prepared to defend at "any forum anywhere in the world" and had done so.

The MRHA, targeted specifically at clerics, would be strengthened in the context of "the experiences that we have seen in the region", Mr Shanmugam said.

"We have now seen what can happen with clerics all over the world and how, when they move in the political sphere wearing their robes, it becomes very dangerous of any religion. We don't allow that in Singapore ... You stick to religion, you don't get involved in the sphere of politics."

In response to queries, MHA said that it was reviewing the need to enhance Singapore's legislative provisions to safeguard racial and religious harmony in the country.

The ministry added that it would give details when the review is completed.