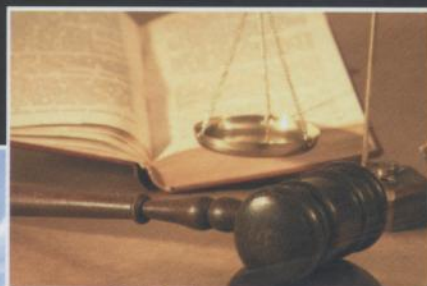
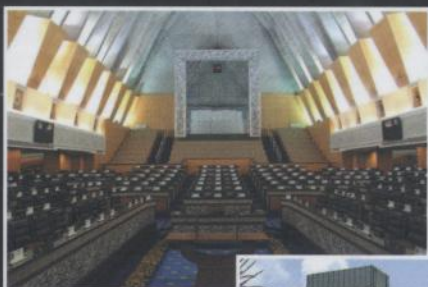


Constitutional Law and Human Rights in Malaysia

Topical Issues and Perspectives

Editor

Khairil Azmin Mokhtar



SWEET & MAXWELL ASIA

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Editor

Khairil Azmin Mokhtar

LLB (Hons) (IIUM), Master of Comparative Laws (IIUM),
PhD in Law (Aberystwyth)

Associate Professor

Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah of Laws
International Islamic University Malaysia

SWEET & MAXWELL ASIA



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Chapter Eighteen

Religious Rights and Freedom: Comparative Perspectives

Khairil Azmin Mokhtar and Siti Aliza binti Alias

18.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter in looking at the religious rights and freedom in Malaysia in a comparative context to other selected national (state) constitutions, as well as to some international instruments and jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Right, advances the argument that conferment of special status of a particular religion in the constitution does not impede the overall religious freedom in the country; and that conversely, the democratic and secular status of a country proclaimed in the constitution may not always guarantee religious freedom as a fundamental human right in the country. The hypotheses are backed by two arguments:

- (1) In countries that provide special recognition of a particular religion, religious rights of, and the freedom to practise, other religions are guaranteed in the constitutions of the respective countries, with some margin given to the state for permissible restrictions. Even in a country that gives special recognition of a religion such as Islam in Malaysia, the freedom of religion of people professing Islam themselves is restricted where it can be seen from case-law that the freedom can be curtailed in some respect. This can be observed in cases regarding the wearing of "purdah" (religious veil) and "serban", as well as cases falling under the purview of the protection or preservation of "public order, public health and public morality"; and
- (2) In countries that proclaim to be democratic and secular (as seen from their constitution), religious freedoms may also be curtailed as