

**'Christians fast losing faith in gov't'**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**March 14, 2011**

The government's apparent foot-dragging over the impoundment of the Bahasa Malaysia (BM) version of the Bible is testing the patience of the Christians.

In a strongly-worded protest against the Islamic state, Herman Shastri, secretary-general of the Council of Churches Malaysia, said the government risks losing its credibility among Christians if it does not resolve the issue quickly.

"If the federal government does not take heed of the appeal of (Sarawak deputy chief minister Dr George Chan) and of the Christians of Sarawak, and make good on assurance given to Christians in the country, and especially in Sabah and Sarawak, (then) any further assurance given by the authorities that this matter will be resolved will carry little weight because promises have been made and broken before," he said.

Chan had reportedly come out strongly in calling for the release of the 30,000 copies of the Bibles in Kuching, saying the Sarawak government believes that the seizure is "totally unacceptable in multi-racial and multi-religious Malaysia".

Other political parties, including BN senior partner MCA and Pakatan Rakyat's DAP and PKR have also called for the release of the BM Bibles, which are meant for the use of Christians in Sarawak.

"We are encouraged by (Chan's) statement... (and that of) many other political leaders and freedom-loving people who have made a similar stand that the Malay language is the language of all Malaysians, and Christians should not be denied reading the Bible in that language," said Herman.

He added that Christians are "distressed" over the matter and are being forced to face as they go through Lent (the fasting month).

Apart from the copies being held up in Kuching, Christians are also pushing for the release of 5,000 copies of the BM edition which have been held in Port Klang for over two years.

### **Legal outcome pending**

In a statement yesterday, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said the impoundment was upon the attorney-general's advice pending disposal of a court case.

The government is appealing a Kuala Lumpur High Court decision favouring Catholic newspaper Herald in its application to use the word 'Allah'.

Hishammuddin also said the matter is currently being "resolved amicably with the parties concerned".

A ministry official had earlier said the copies of the BM Bible, imported from Indonesia, were stopped as a cabinet decision in 1986 bars non-Muslims from using 'Allah', among other terms.

She claimed that the ministry has informed the company which had shipped in the copies to collect these and take them back to Indonesia, but it has not done so.

Bishop Ng Moon Hing, who heads the Christian Federation of Malaysia, however claimed that the ministry had written last June to say that it would release the copies into Malaysia.

It is understood that 10,000 copies in Kuching were released to the local importer late last year.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/158587>