

Huge crowd outside court as gov't appeals 'Allah' case

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By Hafiz Yatim

A huge crowd comprising both Muslim and Christian groups gathered outside the Court of Appeal this morning as a panel of judges begins to hear the government's appeal in the 'Allah' case.

At least four buses were seen outside the Palace of Justice on this cloudy morning in Putrajaya, as the police set up counters outside the massive court complex to screen people and media personnel going into the courtroom.

Apart from Malay rights groups like Perkasa, Pekida and Yayasan Dakwah Islam Malaysia, Christian groups from Sabah and Sarawak are among the crowd.

The Christian groups comprise Sidang Injil Borneo Sabah, Sabah Council of Churches and the Association of Churches Sarawak.

Also present are the main Christian bodies from the peninsula, including the Council of Churches, the Christian Federation of Malaysia and Sidang Injil Borneo Semenanjung.

The Christian groups are holding a watching brief in the matter.

Seven state Islamic religious councils and the Muslim Chinese Association of Malaysia are also holding a watching brief.

The Muslims groups, including members of Umno Wanita and Youth, are seen reciting prayers at the courthouse entrance, with men seated on the left of the entrance door, and women on the right.

They are led by Umno Youth exco Tun Faisal Ismail Aziz and Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali. Perkasa vice-president Zulkifli Noordin is also present outside the courthouse.

When approached, one supporter of the government's appeal, who only wished to be known as Umairah, 26, said she was "excited by the struggle to defend the use of the word 'Allah'".

NONE "I hope they (the government) will win this case. Insyah-Allah, we will fight to the end," said the part-time Pertubuhan Kebajikan Darul Islah Malaysia (Perkid) volunteer (left).

On Dec 31, 2009, the High Court in Kuala Lumpur ruled that the home minister's ban on the use of 'Allah' by Catholic weekly Herald in its Bahasa Malaysia section was unconstitutional.

According to Herald lawyers, Christians in Sabah and Sarawak have been using 'Allah' to refer to God in Bahasa Malaysia since 1631.

On Aug 23, the Court of Appeal dismissed Archbishop Murphy Pakiam's application to strike out the government's appeal.

The church had based its argument on Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's 10-point solution to the Christian community, signed in April 2011, which allowed the use of 'Allah' in Sabah and Sarawak.

The dismissal has led to the government's appeal being heard today before a three-member panel led by Justice Mohamad Apandi Ali and comprising Justices Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahim and Mohamad Zawawi Salleh.

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