

'Herald' editor quizzed under Sedition Act

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By Kow Kwan Yee

Editor of the Catholic weekly The Herald Father Lawrence Andrew recorded a police statement today over his remark that the word 'Allah' will continue to be used in Selangor Catholic churches.

Lawrence, who was accompanied by his lawyer Francis Pereira, said the police was investigating the case under Section 4 of the Sedition Act 1948.

However, Francis said that there was no indication that Lawrence would face any charge at this point of time.

"It is still in the preliminary stage of investigation, according to the police," he said when met at the Selangor police headquarters.

Lawrence was quoted by news portal The Malaysian Insider (TMI) as saying that the word 'Allah' will be used by churches in weekend services in Bahasa Malaysia, as Article 11(3) (A) of the federal constitution prescribes that every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs.

Last week, police went to TMI office to record statements from journalist Eileen Ng and news editor V Vasudevan over the published article, which led to several police reports being lodged by members of the public.

The priest has reportedly said that it was a matter for Christians and cannot be managed by any other religious group as it was against the federal constitution. Thus Catholic churches will continue to use the word 'Allah' in mass.

However, the remark drew flak from some Muslim groups - the Selangor police revealed that a total of 86 police reports were lodged against Lawrence.

It was also reported that the police had recorded statement from 10 individuals who were said to have involvement in the case.

Century-old prayer book

The usage of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims turned even more controversial after the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (JAIS) raided the premises of the Bible

Society of Malaysia (BSM) without a warrant and confiscated over 300 copies of Malay version of the Bible.

To convince the police, Lawrence said he had shown a century-old Malay version of Catholic prayer book, to prove that the congregation in the peninsula had been using 'Allah' even before Independence.

"This prayer book was published in 1905, we want to let everyone understand that congregations here had started using the word 'Allah' even before the era of British colonial rule. What we are doing is legally right," he stressed.

Lawrence also said that he did not receive any threats so far, and urged Christians to continue to live in harmony with those of other religions.

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