

Allah row: Syed Hamid may land in court
Malaysiakini.com
August 07, 2010

The 'Allah' court cases are set to rise a notch with a Christian bumiputera's attempt to get former home minister Syed Hamid Syed Jaafar Albar into the witness box.

Melanau Jill Ireland Lawrence Bill's lawyers had recently filed an application to cross-examine Syed Hamid over her suit against the government, challenging their seizure of eight religious audio CDs.

The CDs were confiscated at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in 2008 when Jill had tried to bring them in from Jakarta, because it had the word 'Allah' printed on their sleeves.

syed hamid albar exclusive interview larger pix 231008 03 Later, she received a Home Ministry letter stating that the CDs were unlawful and that she had failed to pay customs duty.

According to the ministry, the CDs threatened security as the usage of the prohibited word had breached Islamic Development Department (Jakim) guidelines.

For that, her counsel are applying to get Syed Hamid (right) into the hot seat to "explain" the reason for the action, since he was the minister at the time.

'Why is it a threat?'

"It was the former minister who said that these words are banned, which was signed in a circular during the times of (former prime ministers Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi), saying that they were a threat," said Annou Xavier, one of Jill's lawyers.

NONE "So we want to know what threat this is, how it came about and who it threatens.

"The word 'Allah' has been used by the Christian community in Sabah and Sarawak for hundreds of years and then suddenly we are issued with a ministerial statement banning the word. Why?" asked Annou (left) when contacted by Malaysiakini.

He added that the High Lumpur High Court is expecting to set a date to hear their application soon.

"I hope the court will allow us a fair chance to hear his thoughts and what he has to say in banning the word," said Annou.

Apart from an unspecified sum in damages, Jill is seeking an order of certiorari to quash the ministry's directive to confiscate the CDs, and their return.

She is seeking further declarations:

* That she can use the word 'Allah', as well as to own, use and import materials with the word in exercising her religious freedom, as Christians in Sabah and Sarawak have been using 'Allah' for centuries;

* That, under Article 11 of the federal constitution, she is allowed to use and import publications to practise her religion; and,

* That there should be no discrimination on issues pertaining to religion under Article 8.

The word 'Allah' has been the source of contention among Malaysians, especially after a controversial High Court verdict on Dec 31, where it declared the ban on the usage of 'Allah' in the Herald magazine owned by the Catholic Church was illegal.

The lifting of the ban, which is still pending appeal, had triggered a spate of arson attacks on churches and other places including mosques, suraus, a convent school and a Gurdwara.

A sore subject in the country, the police had also previously declared that the issue is 'off-limits' during the Sibu parliamentary by-election campaign, where Christian voters make up a sizeable amount of the electorate.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/139474>