

Groups divided over Allah' use

No consensus from Muslim NGOs at meeting

PETALING JAYA: Key Muslim groups are divided over whether to reject or accept the High Court ruling on the use of the term "Allah" in the *Herald*.

This is the scenario following a meeting hosted by PKR leader Datuk Sen Anwar Ibrahim to discuss the issue on Monday night, which ended without the consensus he had hoped for, with one side adamant that the term is exclusive to Muslims and the other side advocating an open mind.

PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayob said some groups were very firm that the Quran did not forbid non-Muslims from using the term.

He said the groups also saw the issue as an opportunity to better explain Islam to non-Muslims.

Other groups, meanwhile, feared it would open the flood-gates to greater confusion among Muslims and were concerned that the term might be misconstrued and used inappropriately by non-Muslims.

The groups, which attended the meeting that was held at Anwar's house, included PKR, Jamaah Islah Malaysia, Persatuan Ulama Malaysia, Muslim Youth League Malaysia and Teras.

Teras president Mohd Azmi Abdul Aziz stressed the term was central to the sensitivities of Muslims in the country.

"The Muslim NGOs are not

against each other but we differ in our view on the implication of the issue on the future of Muslims as well as the co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims in the country," said Mohd Azmi.

Anwar, whose party stands with PAS in supporting the court decision, had called the meeting to hear out the concerns of these groups.

The Muslim non-governmental organisations are quite powerful opinion shapers and he is anxious to get them behind PKR and PAS on this issue.

There was also a suggestion that polling agency Merdeka Centre be asked to gauge opinions on the matter, but some felt a survey on such a sensitive matter could lead to more controversy.

Merdeka Centre director Ibrahim Suffian, who was present, said the split in opinion was "rooted in fundamental insecurities which Malay leaders must come to terms with".

"The discussion served to demarcate the position of the various groups, although it would have been quite different if the more hardline personalities were invited.

"The polemic going on also underlines Malay concerns and insecurities since the March 8 general election," said Ibrahim.

PAS president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang could not make it because he was overseas.

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