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Nazri: Penang and FT can also use 'Allah'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohd Nazri Aziz, who commented last week that non-Muslims in Sabah and Sarawak should be allowed to use the word Allah, said yesterday that those in Penang and the Federal Ter-

ritories could also use the word as there is no state enactment to prohibit its usage.

The Constitution clearly says no religion, except for Islam, can be propagated among the Muslims, Mohd Nazri, who is the de facto law minister, told reporters after launching the public transport consumer rights awareness campaign here.

He said that since religious matters come under the state, and to give effect to the requirement of the Constitution, every state with a sultan as the head of Islam has its own enactment on the propagation of Islam, except for Penang, the Federal Territories, Sabah and Sarawak.

"In Selangor (for example), (non-Muslims) cannot use the

word Allah because there is already a law to this effect in the Constitution, but in the Federal Territories, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak, we still can," he said.

Mohd Nazri reiterated that the High Court decision on Dec 31, which granted permission to *Herald*, the Catholic weekly newspaper, to use the word Allah on the grounds that it was not exclusive to Islam, should only be effective in Sabah, Sarawak, Penang and the Federal Territories.

"I went to the churches outside Kuching and Rota Kinabalu. It is true that in Sabah and Sarawak, they actually use the word Allah in their sermons and this has been a practice for so many years. So that was why, even if it is against the wish of Jakim (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia), my opinion is that it has been the culture for Sabah and Sarawak, (so) let it be," he said.

"I do not think we should pass a law in Sabah and

Sarawak ... even the Muslims there are familiar with the situation, but here (Peninsular Malaysia) is different as there are already laws in nine out of 11 states."

He said the home minister issued the ban to ensure that all the states in the peninsula were in line with this restriction.

Mohd Nazri said he believed the decision by High Court judge Datuk Lau Bee Lan was wrong "because she should not be deciding on whether the word can be used or not because the home minister has the power under the Act to order the ban in *Herald*'.

"She said the minister did not produce enough evidence ... how could you produce enough evidence when the order is preventive in nature? You cannot wait until churches are burnt and lives are lost then only you want to make an order.

"I personally say that the judge was wrong. For example, the stepping on the cow head incident... I have

not done anything wrong under the law for stepping on a cow's head but because 7% of the population are Hindus, we must respect their sensitivity, that was why the (people allegedly involved) were charged under the Sedition Act even though it is not wrong to step on a cow's head.

"So, do not tell me that you cannot consider the sensitivity of the Muslims?"

Mohd Nazri also said it is all right to translate the Bible into Malay because it is the national language but God should be referred to as Tuhan.

He said it was the Catholic archbishop and publisher of *Herald* Tan Sri Murphy Pakiam who brought the Allah case to court, which left the government with no choice but to follow the judiciary system instead of resolving the issue outside the court.

"It is too late now and we have to use the court system," he said when asked if the government was willing to withdraw the court appeal.