

'Futile to appeal court ruling'

Anwar: Govt allowed non-Muslims in Borneo states to use 'Allah' in '86

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REMBAU: It will be futile to appeal against a court ruling which favoured a Sarawakian Christian, since a 1986 Cabinet decision has stated that non-Muslims in Sabah and Sarawak can use the word "Allah" in certain situations, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Explaining why the government dropped its appeal against a High Court ruling which permitted non-Muslims in Sarawak to use the word "Allah" in educational publications, the Prime Minister said it would not have been wise to pursue it.

He said that filing an appeal on a matter which had already been decided by the government and Malay Rulers was an exercise in futility.

"If one insists on going to court knowing very well that there is no case, then it can only mean that he is not wise.

"The government had already agreed in 1986 and the Malay Rulers had 'given their consent allowing the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims in Sabah and Sarawak under certain conditions.

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Anwar Ibrahim

"So, if we, the government, know of this policy, how are we to appeal against the case in Sarawak?" he said in his speech during a visit to SMKA Dato' Haji Abu Hassan Hassan Haji Sail (Semadah) in Pedas, near here.

On April 18, the government filed a notice to withdraw its appeal against the court decision which had allowed the word "Allah", among others, to be used by non-Muslims in publications for educational purposes.

The appeal was initially scheduled for case management yesterday.

This was in connection to a court decision on March 10, 2021, which had ruled in favour of the Sarawakian Christian from the Melanau tribe, Jill Ireland

Lawrence Bill, by granting three court orders she had sought.

The then government and Home Minister filed an appeal against the High Court decision two days later.

Referring to the government's latest move to drop the appeal, Anwar said this did not mean the government had accepted defeat, but rather it had to work within the confines of the 1986 decision,

"We are grappling with an issue when there is none," he said.

Anwar said he had also informed the Yang di-Pertuan Agong that the Cabinet had taken note of the 1986 ruling but it intends to propose some minor changes to plug loopholes and prevent future court tussles.

"The King has given his consent and the matter will be presented to the Malay Rulers after this," he said, adding that the fact remains there would be no change in the 1986 ruling for now.

However, Anwar said if the Malay Rulers wished to make amendments, the government would adhere to them.

"If the Malay Rulers decide that non-Muslims are not allowed to use 'Allah', the government will obey the instruction.

"But as of today, the 1986 policy states that it is allowed in Sabah and Sarawak," he said.

He said despite the policy, critics of the government were bent

on spreading politics of hatred using Islam.

Anwar said the decision not to pursue the case was not made by him.

"I would like to ask why the other governments before this, including those in power two or three years ago, did not do anything about it?

"But today, they are whacking US without basis," he said.

His government, he said, was committed to safeguarding and strengthening the position of Islam.

He cited examples such as the Budget 2023 which allocated an additional RM150mil to repair and upgrade tahfiz and pondok schools.

"Some people accused us of belittling Islam but the allocation was even higher than the previous year," he said.

At yesterday's event, Anwar said the Federal Government would allocate another RM1.2mil for upgrading and repair works at Semadah.

Prior to this, RM3mil was provided to repair a section of a boys' dormitory that was damaged in a blaze last year.

"This is a government committed to helping such religious schools and produce more scholars, but yet we are being accused of compromising the position of Islam," he added.