

Nik Aziz maintains 'Allah' can be used by non-Muslims
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 — There is no issue for non-Muslims to use "Allah", PAS spiritual leader Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat has said, in the face of Malay-Muslim confusion over a controversy that had ignited religious tension in recent months.

The Kelantan menteri besar, however, maintained that the term cannot be translated to mean "God" or "Lord", saying this was consistent with the PAS syura council's view that "Allah" cannot be used in religious texts of the non-Muslims.

But critics felt the decision from the council, the Islamist party's highest decision-making body, was "contradictory", with one suggesting that if "Allah" can be used by non-Muslims orally, why the prohibition against its usage in religious texts.

Speaking to Sinar Harian, Nik Abdul Aziz (picture) said this was a non-issue.

"On Allah we have decided a month ago. I don't have to repeat myself on this. Something that is not supposed to be an issue is made into an issue.

"Allah was used by the devil since in heaven. When the devil met with Adam in heaven, he had to use Allah's name. The father of Prophet Muhammad is Abdullah, he converted to Islam so what is our issue?

"The only problem is when God and Lord is translated as Allah, that is not correct," the PAS leader was quoted as saying.

Muslim and religious leaders of other minority faiths here have been at loggerheads over use of "Allah" following the 2009 landmark High Court judgment awarding the Catholic Church the right to publish the word in the Bahasa Malaysia section of its weekly newspaper, Herald, catering to its large Bumiputera Christian following in Sarawak and Sabah.

Muslims are Malaysia's biggest religious group at 60 per cent, while the minority Christians, who form just under 10 per cent of the 28 million total population, have been at the forefront of issues confronting the non-Muslim community, which are provided for under the country's Constitution.

The debate was reignited recently after DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng called on Putrajaya to lift a ban on the Borneo-bound Malay-language bibles that carry the "Allah" word, saying east Malaysian Christians have used the word in their worship for centuries.

PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang claimed the syura council's decision had laid to rest the "Allah" controversy and that the DAP's top leadership had accepted the explanation given by Nik Aziz.

DAP chairman Karpal Singh, however, denied the claim and said the syura council's stand conflicted with the position of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), a coalition made up of PAS, the DAP and PKR.

According to Sinar Harian, Nik Aziz refused to comment on suggestions that the syura council clarify the confusion.

The “Allah” dispute, which first erupted just after the watershed Election 2008, has continued to be a boiling topic in the run up to Election 2013 which is expected to be called within weeks.

A whopping 83 per cent of Malay voters insist that only Muslims have the absolute right to call their god “Allah”, a poll released on Wednesday showed.

Independent pollster Merdeka Center, which surveyed 1,021 voters in Peninsular Malaysia at the end of January, reported that most of the Malay voters — who formed 59 per cent of the survey group — say only Muslims are entitled to use the Arabic word for God.

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