

**Offence to 'influence' judiciary on Allah issue, says Karpal  
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GEORGE TOWN, April 26 — Any comment on the government's pending appeal against a High Court ruling that non-Muslims can use the term "Allah" is sub judice and is an offence, DAP national chairman Karpal Singh said today.

He was commenting on BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak's support for the appeal against the 2009 ruling in an interview with the Al Jazeera station to be aired tomorrow. An excerpt of the interview was obtained and reported by The Malaysian Insider today.

"The appeal is still pending and only the Court of Appeal can overturn the High Court decision," Karpal (picture) said.

He said Najib's statement in supporting the appeal to overturn the court decision could be seen as a bid to influence the judiciary process.

"This is very serious. He should be careful as the prime minister and not make statements like this," Karpal said.

He also said it was an election offence for Najib to say this, and that if Pakatan Rakyat (PR) were to come into power Najib would be charged.

The Court of Appeal has fixed May 30 for another case management on the government and Home Ministry's appeal against the High Court ruling that allows the word "Allah" be used by the Catholic weekly newspaper Herald.

Catholic priest Father Lawrence Andrew, who edits the Herald, also cautioned Najib against making statements on the "Allah" issue pending its hearing.

The parish priest of St Anne's Church in Port Klang reminded Najib of his 10-point written assurance that his government would uphold the religious freedom for the country's minorities in April 2011.

Najib's backing of the appeal now would be seen as an attempt to "influence" the court, the clergyman said.

"Our case is coming up next month after election, he shouldn't be saying this now," Andrew told The Malaysian Insider over the phone, referring to Najib.

"What message is he giving? What is he doing? He's influencing the judges," he added, before asking, "Who is there to respect the law?"

In a landmark decision in 2009, the High Court ruled that the Herald had the right to publish the word "Allah" for the Christian God in the Malay section of its newspaper as the Arabic word was not exclusive to Muslims, as many Malaysians of that faith believe.

Andrew noted that Najib was now in a caretaker position as prime minister, and expressed concern over the 59-year-old's seeming withdrawal from his previous strong commitment.

In the 10-point resolution, the Cabinet, through its minister Datuk Seri Idris Jala, assured the sizeable Bumiputera Christian population in Sabah and Sarawak that they were free to bring in and use their bibles in Malay as well as in indigenous languages.

Andrew also reminded Najib that he had assured Christian Malaysians on both sides of the South China Sea that his 1 Malaysia administration would not prohibit nor restrict their right to bring along their bibles and Christian materials during such travel. "Now in front of his constituents he's preaching a different message. Or is it his stand now that he's changed his position?" the senior clergyman asked.

"There must be justice," he said.

Christians comprise about nine per cent of the country's 28 million population.

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