

**No compromise, "Allah is exclusive to Muslims. Full stop," says Home Minister
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Ahead of the government appeal in the Court of Appeal over the use of "Allah", Putrajaya has taken a firm stand that the term referring to God cannot be used by non-Muslims.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said today non-Muslims must respect the rights of Muslims over the matter and there cannot be any compromise.

"They must respect. The use of the word Allah is exclusive to Muslims. Full stop," Ahmad Zahid told reporters after attending a Hari Raya open house organised by Pengasih in Kuala Lumpur.

Ahmad Zahid said he meant no disrespect to the court.

"All Muslims irrespective of their religious and political inclination must be united over the issue," he said.

The Court of Appeal has fixed Wednesday to hear the application of the Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur to strike out the government's appeal against a High Court ruling to allow a Catholic weekly newspaper to use the word "Allah".

In the event the Titular Roman Catholic Archbishop fails to strike out the appeal, the Court of Appeal will proceed to hear the government's appeal on September 10.

The church will argue that the appeal is irrational and illogical.

The reason: a list of promises given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in April 2011 just before the Sarawak state elections explicitly allowed Catholics to use the word "Allah".

With one eye on the Christian vote in the East Malaysian state, Najib offered a 10-point solution to the problems faced by Christians in practising their religion freely as provided under the Federal Constitution.

Among other things, the prime minister said Christians were free to bring in and use Malay-language Bibles.

These Bibles contained the word "Allah" and were being seized by the authorities, sparking outrage by Christians in Sabah and Sarawak. They said their prayers in Bahasa Malaysia and had used the word "Allah" for centuries.

The position taken by the Catholic Church is that given that the 10-point solution allows the importation of books where the word "Allah" is used, it is illogical for the government to challenge its use in the Herald, a weekly publication under the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur.

Former Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Hussein filed an affidavit earlier this month on behalf of Putrajaya to challenge the striking out application.

His ground is that the Allah issue has no relation to the 10-point solution.

The striking out attempt is the latest saga in the long-drawn battle between the church and the state over the right to use the word "Allah".

The controversy began when Hishamuddin's predecessor Datuk Syed Hamid Albar signed an order prohibiting the Herald from using the word "Allah".

This led to a suit by Archbishop Murphy Pakiam in March 2009 in which he named the home ministry and the government as respondents.

Among other things, the church sought a declaration that Syed Hamid's decision was illegal and that the word "Allah" was not exclusive to Islam.

On December 31, 2009, judge Lau Bee Lan allowed the church's judicial review application and lifted the home minister's ban, declaring that the minister's ban was illegal.

The Herald, published in four languages, has been using the word "Allah" as a translation for God in its Malay-language section since September 1995, but the government argued that "Allah" should be used exclusively by Muslims.

Though the Catholic Church brought the suit against the government, other Christians and even the Sikh community have made it clear that the word "Allah" should not be exclusively for Muslims, pointing out its centuries-long usage in Malaysia and other countries. - August 17, 2013.

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