

Catholic Church calls for respect as "Allah" issue has its day in court Thursday
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The Catholic Church has expressed grave concern over recent statements on the use of the word "Allah", a matter which is still pending at the Court of Appeal.

A statement issued today by Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur chancellor Father Jestus Pereira noted that "many of the statements are stoking racial sentiments and creating religious tension in our country.

"We humbly request all parties to respectfully allow the judicial process to take its course and urge the relevant authorities to take necessary steps to prevent any untoward incidence. We pray that peace and good sense will prevail," he said.

The church's call comes following comments from Malay rights group Perkasa yesterday that they will demonstrate on Thursday outside the Court of Appeal which is set to hear the church's application to strike out the government's appeal against a High Court decision allowing the church's newspaper, Herald, to use the word "Allah".

Perkasa secretary-general Syed Hassan Syed Ali, in calling for Muslims to gather at the Court of Appeal, said they wanted to support the Home Ministry's efforts to prohibit non-Muslims from referring to God as "Allah" in print materials.

He had also said that the court decision on the "Allah" issue was very important to Muslims and that they needed to defend the word from being misused by the followers of other religions.

On Saturday, Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the word Allah was exclusive to Muslims.

The home minister further added, "All Muslims irrespective of their religious and political inclination must be united on the issue."

In an interview with The Malaysian Insider earlier today, Herald editor Father Lawrence Andrew urged Catholics to "stay where they are and pray" during the court case on Thursday morning.

Andrew said he received text messages from Catholics asking if they should turn up at the Court of Appeal, but the priest told them, "Stay back, don't come."

Thursday's court date is the latest one in the church's stand that it should be allowed to use the word "Allah" in the Herald.

On Dec 31, 2009, High Court 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 government appealed the decision which led to the church's application to strike it out.
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