

Barisan Nasional lawmakers in Borneo assessing damage done by Allah decision
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Hours after the Court of Appeal banned the word Allah in Herald, Barisan Nasional (BN) lawmakers in Sabah and Sarawak began scrambling to assess the political impact of the court decision in the two Borneo states.

In Sarawak, attention is now on the Christian Dayak rural seats that shored up the ruling coalition in the May general election.

The myriad of comments in the various social media sites had set off alarm bells in the offices of Dayak state cabinet minister, BN's Dayak assemblymen and political secretaries to Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

The political secretaries are Taib's "eyes and ears" to the Dayak political ground.

"There will be a negative impact without a doubt," said Paul Igai, a political secretary to the chief minister.

"The court ruling is a big blow to us. We have started assessing the impact," he told The Malaysian Insider.

In Sabah, similar fears prevail, where United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut (UPKO) secretary-general Datuk Madius Tangau admitted that church leaders were disappointed with the Allah ruling and have some serious concerns about whether it will infringe on their rights to worship in Bahasa Malaysia.

As such, he added that they are hoping that the 10-point solution given to Sabah and Sarawak in 2011 will hold.

"I admit that it will have some effect on the support for the ruling government, that is my personal view, but it is not necessarily going to be in favour of the opposition either," he told The Malaysian Insider.

"The voters know that there are members of the opposition who will use this issue to shore up support for themselves."

He said in the last general election, the opposition used the Allah issue, as well as the bible-burning threat by Perkasa chief Datuk Ibrahim Ali to shore up support.

"Polling was on a Sunday, and so voters went to church before coming out to vote. That time, the opposition also played up the issue that 'a vote for BN was one Bible burned'," he said, adding that despite this, BN still managed to win 22 of the 25 parliament seats it contested.

Madius admitted, however, that in his Tuaran parliament constituency, they lost in two of the three state seats that had a Kadazandusun Christian majority because of these issues.

He warned that if Putrajaya allowed Perkasa and its leaders to carry on, it could spell

trouble for BN in Sabah.

Perkasa deputy president Datuk Zulkifli Noordin had urged Putrajaya to extend the Allah ban to Sabah and Sarawak as well, after yesterday's Court of Appeal decision.

Zulkifli had said that churches in Sabah and Sarawak should be "educated" on the court ruling.

Sabah State Reform Party (Star) chief Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan echoed Madius' call to reign in Zulkifli, adding that the Perkasa number two was adding fuel to fire with his statement.

Jeffrey added that those making unnecessary comments about including Sabah and Sarawak into the Allah ban were playing a dangerous game.

"To say that the ban should be extended to Sabah and Sarawak is provocation. This has been a BN tool, to instigate using religion," Jeffrey said.

One area which is of immediate concern to Taib Mahmud's political secretary Igai, is Baram, home to the largely devout Orang Ulu who belong to the Borneo Evangelical Church. The May general election saw support for the BN in Baram erode dramatically.

This was blamed on the Sarawak state government's proposal to build a hydroelectric dam there which would see more than 6,000 people displaced by the project.

Another area which Igai said BN should worry about is the largely Iban area of Sri Aman. The Ibans are mostly Anglicans.

Last month one of Sarawak's biggest Dayak-based party, the Party Rakyat Sarawak (PRS), warned its BN partners that the next fight for the control of the state will be in the 24 Dayak seats, all of which are Christian-majority.

"The state election may be three years away but we are going to have our hands full to manage the situation," said Igai, adding that how BN will perform then will depend on how they deal with the current problem, especially on the Allah issue.

Jeffrey also warned that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak cannot remain silent on this issue anymore.

"If he does not say something soon, the next general election will have a different outcome for BN," he added.

BN took 47 of the 56 federal seats in Sabah and Sarawak, contributing one-third of the 133 federal seats it won in GE13, despite both states only having a quarter of the 222 seats in Parliament. - October 15, 2013.

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