

Christians not surprised at Allah ban, it was Umno trying to gain favour, says BBC Malaysian Insider
Oct 15 , 2013
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Banning Christians from using the word Allah is seen as Umno's efforts to boost its Islamic credentials and win back support from the majority Malays, BBC News said in a commentary yesterday.

Its Malaysian correspondent Jennifer Pak observed that yesterday's Court of Appeal ruling which banned the use of the word Allah in the Bahasa Malaysia section of the Catholic weekly, the Herald, had not surprised Christians in the country who make up about 9% of the population.

"Many of them believe that the case stems from a tight race between the governing Malay-Muslim party, UMNO, and the opposition Islamic party, PAS," she offered.

"It's an issue that crops up in the government-linked media ahead of an election and promptly dwindles after the vote."

She noted that while not all Muslims supported the government's decision to ban the word, Malay rights group Perkasa was one of the most outspoken supporters of the ban.

Meanwhile, a United Arab Emirates daily - The National - expressed its surprise over the decision made by the three-man panel in the Court of Appeal, calling it "wrong".

"The Malaysian decision overlooks not merely the theology, but also the etymology of the word. The word 'Allah' is derived from the Arabic 'al-ilah', the God. It's found its way across the world and entered Malay from Arabic," the editorial said.

"The word 'Allah' is never exclusive to Islam – indeed, both Christians and Jews used the word to refer to God even before the coming of Islam.

"The Quran itself is explicit on this subject, declaring, in Surah Al Ankabut, that Muslims should tell People of the Book (Christians and Jews) that 'our God and your God is one'."

The newspaper pointed out that the UAE, being a Muslim country with "substantial Christian and Hindu populations", was proud of its society where those of different faiths were able to practise them "openly and without discrimination".

"One of the reasons Islam was able to spread so far, so rapidly, was the inclusive nature of the faith."

The Middle East daily has spoken out several times before on the issue as the usage of the word has been debated in Malaysia since early 2010.

In January 2010, a columnist for the paper said, "the Malaysians violently protesting against Christians using the word 'Allah' is only misplaced sentiment which betrays insufficient knowledge of Islam".

"According to Islam, Allah is the Arabic proper name for The Almighty God, the creator of

the whole human race. Allah is the very same God of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and all the other prophets and messengers. In the light of the above facts, the rage of Malaysians is only wasted energy and misguided fervour," said Akash Sagar.

Another columnist for The National, Khaled Diab, pointed out earlier this month that Malaysia would be "misguided" to ban the Arabic word for God.

"Most Malaysians do not speak Arabic and so some of the Muslims among them may be under the false impression that 'Allah' is an exclusively Islamic word. But they are mistaken. 'Allah' is simply the Arabic word for 'God'," he argued. – October 15, 2013.

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