

Court of Appeal judges influenced by right-wing forces in Allah issue, says PAS lawmaker

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An opposition lawmaker believes that the three Court of Appeal judges were influenced by right-wing Muslim groups when they unanimously banned the word Allah from being used in the Bahasa Malaysia section of the Catholic weekly, the Herald.

PAS's Parit Buntar MP, Mujahid Yusof Rawa (pic), an advocate of interfaith dialogue, said the decision was a setback to interfaith relations and that right-wing forces were responsible for the current predicament.

Malay rights groups Perkasa, Jalur Tiga and Pertubuhan Pembela Islam have been at the forefront of protests against the use of the word Allah in this issue.

The Court of Appeal, which allowed the appeal by Putrajaya to reverse an earlier High Court ruling that the Herald could use the word, relied on religious and political reasons to come up with yesterday's decision, said Mujahid.

A three-man bench led by Datuk Seri Mohamed Apandi Ali said the name Allah was not an integral part of the Christian faith and practice.

The court said it found no reason why the church was so adamant in wanting to use the name Allah.

Apandi said such usage, if allowed, would inevitably cause confusion within the community, adding that the welfare of an individual or group must give way to the majority community.

Mujahid, who is also a PAS central committee member, said he respected the court decision but disagreed with the way the issue was handled by Putrajaya.

"There has been a lot of media coverage by the government media, representing the extreme right-wing views. These are people who are not able to understand the need for interfaith relationship. They were given attention as if they represent the whole (Muslim) society, which is not the case," Malaysiakini quoted him as saying.

The son of former PAS president Yusof Rawa said he begged to differ on the threat of proselytization among Muslims as highlighted by the judges.

He said this only went to indicate that the followers of Islam were weak.

Mujahid said Muslims should protect other faiths to ensure freedom of religion and show others that there was no compulsion in Islam.

"We should see the bigger picture. But the decision only meant that people of all faiths cannot be united if we continue to be like this," he said.

Mujahid said the ruling would have a wider impact, especially among Christians in Sabah and Sarawak who use the Bible in the Indonesian and indigenous languages.

He said it was upsetting that the right wing was influencing Putrajaya to the extent of calling for a ban of the word Allah in Sabah and Sarawak.

"If this is done, it would create more problems as the natives had been using the word in their worship for a long, long time," he said.

Since the High Court ruling four years ago, Mujahid has been holding dialogues with Malaysians of different faiths.

He has visited more than 30 churches to meet Christians in interfaith dialogues and assure them Islam would protect all places of worship.

This was after some churches and mosque were vandalised following the High Court decision in 2009 where the Herald was allowed to use the word Allah. Following that decision several churches were vandalised while a pig's head was thrown near a mosque.

Mujahid said these meetings had managed to bridge the gap and that followers of various religions should continue to sit down and talk in a civilised manner. – October 15, 2013.

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