

**Dr M to Herald editor: Respect court's 'Allah' ruling**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9 — Senior Catholic priest Father Lawrence Andrew should respect a Court of Appeal's decision to uphold a ban on the word "Allah", former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on Andrew's insistence that the churches in Selangor will continue to use the word "Allah", saying that the Catholic Church weekly Herald's editor should prioritise and respect the sensitivities of Muslims.

The country's longest serving prime minister also appeared to criticise the Catholic Church, suggesting that it had chose to ignore the court ruling, while questioning why the Christian community insisted on using the word "Allah" in Peninsular Malaysia.

"The case was referred to the court by them, but when the court made the decision, they did not bother. What will happen when society does not respect the court's decision?"

"The use of the word 'Allah' in Sabah and Sarawak has been going on for a long while. Never mind, but why all of a sudden (did they) want to use it here?" Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying in a report today by the New Straits Times and other local dailies.

Christians make up about 10 per cent of the Malaysian population, or 2.6 million. Almost two-thirds of them are Bumiputera and are largely based in Sabah and Sarawak, where they routinely use Bahasa Malaysia and indigenous languages in their religious practices, including describing God as "Allah" in their prayers and holy book.

Many of the Bumiputera Christians in Sabah and Sarawak have migrated to the peninsula to live and work, with some of the churches here holding Bahasa Malaysia services to cater to their needs, the Orang Asli community here and other Malay-speaking Christians.

In the October ruling by the Court of Appeal, a three-man panel ruled that the word "Allah" was not integral to the Christian faith and decided to maintain the Home Ministry's ban on the Arabic word in the Herald.

The government has since then said the Court of Appeal's decision was only limited to the Herald, but the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais)'s shocking raid and seizure of bibles containing the word "Allah" last Thursday has cast doubt on the extent of the ruling's applicability.

The ongoing legal dispute between the government and the Catholic Church over its right to print the word "Allah" in the Herald's Bahasa Malaysia section is still pending before the Federal Court, which is set to hear arguments from both sides on February 24 before deciding on whether it will hear an appeal by the Catholic Church.

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