

'Allah' exclusive to Muslims, Kedah Sultan says
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 19 — The right to use “Allah” belongs exclusively to Muslims, Kedah Sultan Abdul Halim Mu’adzan Shah said today as he openly declared his stand in the ongoing dispute that has threatened religious ties in Malaysia.

The state ruler, who is also the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, reminded all parties that the National Fatwa Council had already ruled in 1986 that several words, including “Allah”, can only be used exclusively by Muslims while non-Muslims are banned from uttering them.

“In the context of multi-racial society, religious sensitivity, in particular Islam as the official religion of the Federation, must be observed.

“Confusion and controversy could be averted if all party abide by the law and judicial decisions,” the King was quoted as saying in a speech today, according to the *New Straits Times*.

His speech was read out by Sultan of Kedah Council of Regency chairman Tan Sri Tunku Annuar Sultan Badlishah during the investiture ceremony held in conjunction with Sultan of Kedah’s 86th birthday at Istana Anak Bukit.

The King also stressed the importance of mutual respect among those of different races and religions in a multi-racial society like Malaysia.

“Without stability, the state and the country would be in chaos and it is feared that enemies from within will seize the opportunity to implement their agenda,” he said, according to the *NST*.

Temperatures have risen of late over the so-called “Allah” row that remains unresolved four years after it shocked the nation and led to the worst religious strife in the country’s history.

Last October, the Court of Appeal overturned a High Court ruling that had favoured the Catholic Church in its suit against the Home Ministry after *the Herald* was banned from publishing the word “Allah”.

The case is now pending a March 5 hearing for leave to appeal at the Federal Court.

Religious tensions deepened when shortly after the October court verdict, the Selangor Sultan issued a decree last November prohibiting non-Muslims from referring to God as “Allah”, citing a 1988 state law that bans such usage.

On January 3, the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) moved to enforce the ban and raided the office of a bible distributor before carting off with over 300 Malay and Iban language bibles that contain the word “Allah”.

Church groups and lawmakers bristled at the move and accused the authorities of violating the 10-point solution mooted by Cabinet in 2011 to resolve the issue.

The 10-point solution, issued by the Najib administration shortly before the Sarawak state election in 2011, allowed for bibles in Malay and indigenous languages to be printed, imported and distributed nationwide with certain conditions imposed for Peninsula Malaysia.

Christians make up close to 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.

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