

PM: State laws take precedence over 10-point agreement

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 27 — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak reiterated today that state enactments on the use of terms deemed exclusive to Muslims override the Cabinet's more generous 10-point agreement on the matter.

"The 10 points are subject to state constitution and enactments. Where there are state enactments, they will supersede the 10-point agreement," he told reporters.

"We have made our stance clear."

Najib's remarks follow the seizure of over 300 Malay- and Iban-language bibles by the Selangor religious authorities exercising a state law that prohibits non-Muslims from using 35 Arabic words and phrases, including "Allah" to refer to God.

On Thursday, Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin revealed that the Cabinet's long-awaited decision over the contentious seizure of Malay- and Iban-language bibles by the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) was to uphold the 10-point solution and leave the matter to the state.

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.

Khairy stressed that the raid on the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) by Jais was done based on a state enactment, which cannot be over-ruled by the 2011 guidelines.

The Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988 bans non-Muslims from using 35 Arabic words and phrases in their faith, including the word for God "Allah".

But the Selangor administration has also said it will not intervene in the investigation, stressing only that the department should conclude its probe in a fortnight.

It is unclear where this leaves the BSM and the bibles seized, as the society has repeatedly said the books seized fully complied with the 10-point solution.

The Cabinet's decision had been awaited in the hopes it would also provide guidance in the ongoing tussle over "Allah" between Christians and Muslims.

Tempers continue to simmer in the worsening row over the Arabic word that has now spilled beyond the legal case between the government and the Catholic Church over its right to use “Allah” in its weekly newspaper Herald.

The issue worsened after Jais said it would begin enforcing the state enactment that it insists bars non-Muslims from using “Allah”.

The ongoing legal dispute is still pending before the Federal Court, which is set to hear arguments from both sides on March 5 before deciding on whether it will hear an appeal by the Catholic Church.

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