

Southeast Asia Anglican head questions Najib's silence on seized-Bibles issue

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By Desmond Davidson

The head of the Anglican Church in Southeast Asia has questioned Datuk Seri Najib Razak's silence on the seized-Bibles issue and said it appeared to be a political strategy.

"I am inclined to think that he is conveying that the whole charade is not worthy of his comment. To do otherwise is to dignify what is plainly wicked," Archbishop Datuk Bolly Lapok said today.

Lapok, who is also chairman of the Association of Churches in Sarawak, also questioned the prime minister's refusal to condemn the action of the extreme minority "that is poisoning inter-religious tolerance".

"The prime minister's inaction may be politically smart. But is it morally right?" he said.

Lapok said Putrajaya's "silence, and implicit support of open patronage" has emboldened the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (Jais) to defy the Attorney-General's (A-G) order last Wednesday to release the Malay-language and Iban-language Bibles, also known as the Alkitab and Bup Kudus respectively, to The Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM).

Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail had said the BSM was cleared of wrongdoing, but the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (Mais) instead said the A-G had erred in his decision and insisted there were grounds to prosecute the BSM under the Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation among Muslims) Enactment 1988.

A defiant Mais is now also seeking a court ruling to dispose of the 321 Bibles seized in the raid.

"Unless nipped in the bud, we have a perfect recipe that can cause Malaysia to descend into anarchy," said Lapok.

In his attack on Putrajaya, Lapok also asked, where is the "muhibbah" (goodwill) spirit among Malaysians of late?

"When unscrupulous individuals are allowed to behave and make reckless utterances with impunity for the sake of political exigency, I dread to think of the consequences on the minds of Malaysia's plural society.

"It is sad to see what some Malaysians have become. Where is the muhibbah spirit that has traditionally characterised the Malaysian society?" he said.

The seized Bible issue took another turn when the Sultan of Selangor yesterday ordered Jais to refer a decision whether to return or dispose of the Bibles to the public prosecutor.

Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah's private secretary Datuk Mohamad Munir Bani in a statement said the decree is in line with the minutes issued by the A-G's Chambers that "Jais has to act in accordance to the law on the issue of the seized bibles".

"Jais should promptly refer it to the state public prosecutor for it to be brought to court for final determination," the sultan said in the statement.

The sultan also said the issue should not be politicised by any quarter resulting in confusion by proposing solutions which are not based on law. – June 20, 2014.

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