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## **Christmas decried as 'ploy' to lead Muslims astray**

World Watch Monitor (24.12.2014) - For Malaysian Christians, 2014 has been a year when they had to dig deep into their spiritual resources to withstand a sustained onslaught on their faith by Islamic authorities with the apparent collusion of state power.

There has been no let-up even in the week before Christmas. Malay Muslims were warned to beware the celebration of the birth of Christ because the festival is aimed at wooing them to the Christian faith.

The local branch of Hizbut Tharir, a global Islamic organisation that advocates the creation of an Islamic caliphate, issued the warning.

According to the news portal [malaymailonline](http://malaymailonline.com), the group, in its weekly newsletter issued at mosques on Dec. 19, claimed that "Christmas was a ploy to plant the seeds of religious pluralism into the minds of Muslims so Christianity can be considered as a religion equal to Islam". The group also chastised Muslims who would wish their Christian friends a "Merry Christmas" as being "shameless".

An Islamic non-governmental organisation ISMA, that propagates Malaysian Muslim solidarity, reiterated on Dec. 22 that it would be improper for Muslims to wish Christians a "Merry Christmas".

The directives sit uncomfortably in a multi-racial and multi-religious country with a diversified and syncretic cultural heritage. Of the population of nearly 30 million, about 3 million is Christian and the Malaysian Constitution upholds freedom of worship.

After such messages, provocative outbursts against Christians subsequently posted on Facebook in turn prompted moderate Muslims to demonstrate support for the minority. Their sentiments were summed up by one direct response: "I'm a Muslim ... may my Christian friends have a merrier Christmas."

The official line, however, from the National Fatwa Council is that Muslims are barred from attending Christmas celebrations where Christian-associated symbols such as Christmas trees, Santa Claus-type attire and grottoes are displayed, or carols sung.

Members of the Malay supremacist group Perkasa on Dec. 19 ripped down a celebratory Christmas banner displayed outside the office of the opposition Democratic Action Party in the town of Ipoh, about 130 miles north of the capital Kuala Lumpur. The vandalism went unchallenged by police, but it was broadcast by the television arm of news portal Malaysiakini.

In a tumultuous year, one incident that particularly angered the Christian community and human rights groups was the decision by the Attorney-General not to prosecute Perkasa's leader, Ibrahim Ali, for his threat in 2013 to burn Bibles.

The Government's senior law officer maintained that the reason not to prosecute Ali was because his threat "was not intended to cause religious disharmony, but was only to defend the sanctity of Islam".

The biggest blow to Malaysian Christians in 2014 was the loss of an appeal in the Federal Court to revoke a government ban on the use of the word "Allah" by the Catholic newspaper the Herald. Malaysia's highest court ruled that only Malay Muslims had a right to its usage, although the word precedes the birth of Islam.

The controversial ruling has led to two diverse interpretations: the protagonists in the case maintain that the verdict specifically applies to the Herald, while the Islamists insist that it applies across the country to all aspects of usage of Allah in Christian scripture and literature. The word, whose roots are in Hebrew, has been in use in the country for almost 100 years – long before Malaysia's independence in 1957.

The church and the legal establishment say the ruling discriminates against Christians. The Sarawak-based Borneo Evangelical Mission made an impassioned plea to Prime Minister Najib Razak for the right to use Allah throughout the country since "religious freedom" is an inherent right under the Federal Constitution.

The year began with a raid by the Islamic authorities on the premises of the Bible Society of Malaysia in the state of Selangor, where they seized 330 bibles. These scriptures, for the use of indigenous races whose native tongue is Malay, use the word "Allah" to describe God.

As the year drew to a close, Christian joy at the news that the Bibles were returned wore off quickly when it was found they had been stamped with a message stating that the books were "strictly for non-Muslim usage only, and shall not be published or used in any part of the state of Selangor."

In early December, police disrupted a church service in the town of Bangi, also in Selangor state. The worshippers were mainly people of Indonesian origin and the service was being conducted in Malay.

Later, hymn books containing the word Allah were seized from a priest in the southern state of Johore and the cleric detained under an Act of the Penal Code, which had been declared unconstitutional in 1988.

This police action was widely criticised by human rights groups in the country, who said Malaysia was fast-gaining unwelcome notoriety for its Bible-seizing activities.

Former Bar Council President Ambiga Sreenevasan called on the authorities to stop harassing Christians, to apologise to the priest, Cyril Mannayagam, and to return the 31 hymnals, titled "Praise be to God." The books were returned a fortnight later.

In Penang, ruled by a party in opposition to the governing United Malays National Organisation, the Malay Chinese Chief Minister is being investigated for stating that "Allah" can be used by non-Muslims in the state. He is accused of "intending to insult and provoke a breach of the peace". Christians and others pointed out that, in contrast, Perkasa leader Ali was let off for threatening to burn Bibles.

They point to arbitrary actions on the part of the authorities who openly appear to flout the law, and the constitutional right to freedom of worship, as disturbing and alarming in a country that had been known for multiracial harmony.

Militant Islamists also have begun to target moderate Muslim organisations, such as Sisters in Islam, which promotes the rights of women within the frameworks of Islam and universal human rights, as being too liberal. Increasingly, Muslims who question extremists are denigrated and, in some cases, dragged through the courts.

A senior Christian bishop, who asked not to be identified, said the global resurgence of Islam is having a detrimental effect in Malaysia. Zealots, he said, seek to be "pure and conservative" and want to impose Sharia and harsh "hudud" laws that prescribe mutilating limbs or death by stoning for theft and robbery.

The government of Najib Razak, the bishop said, is pandering to the Islamists because the political support for the United Malays National Organisation is in the predominantly Malay rural heartland. Within the party, he said, the prime minister is facing increasingly conservative opposition. In the past month he was forced to abandon his promise to repeal the colonial-era Sedition Act, under which his critics, including prominent Malay academics, have been charged.

"In this scenario of a weak Government, the radicals are trying to push their way around," the bishop said.

He said the global church has yet to engage in radical re-thinking to respond to the rise of political Islam championed by groups such as the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" proclaiming a caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria, and which has attracted Malaysian Muslim jihadis. "We don't have a strategy," the bishop said, quoting the words used by U.S. President Barack Obama to describe America's approach in dealing with IS.

The rising Islamic extremism in Malaysia prompted a group of 25 eminent moderate Muslims to publish an open letter to the Prime Minister urging him to "champion open and coherent debate and discourse on the administration of Islamic laws in this country to ensure that justice is done."

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## **Archbishop Lapok: "'Allah' ban akin to cultural genocide"**

Anglican New Service (06.10.2014)

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/10/archbishop-lapok-allah-ban-akin-to-cultural-genocide.aspx> - Putrajaya's [the federal administrative centre of Malaysia] persistence in refusing non-Muslim Malaysians the right to use the word "Allah" is tantamount to the systematic destruction of the language and culture of the Bumiputera community in Sabah and Sarawak, the head of the Anglican Church in Southeast Asia said.

Archbishop Datuk Bolly Lapok said the word "Allah" has been part and parcel of the community's language for generations and has become "embedded" in every aspect of

their culture, including for the Bumiputera Christians, who make up the majority of Malaysia's Christian population.

However, the government's prohibition and the Federal Court's denial for the Catholic Church to appeal for the right to publish the "Allah" in its weekly newspaper, had made the Bumiputera Christians feel they had been wronged, said the Sarawakian senior clergyman.

"In other words, it is in our language and culture DNA. We feel that the judgment was made without taking into due consideration of what the word means to us.

"We feel there has been a miscarriage of justice. It is insidious. It is tantamount to an act of language and culture genocide," said Bolly, who also chairs the Association of Churches in Sarawak.

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## **When, why and how Christians use the word 'Allah' — CFM**

Malay Mail Online (22.07.2014) -

### Introduction and Background

The objective of this document is to explain briefly to those Christians who do not understand when, why and how Churches in Malaysia use the word 'Allah'. It is also for Christians who are confused about how to respond, when confronted by the ignorance of non-Muslims about the Christian use of the word 'Allah'.

There are many (misleading) statements by non-Christians who claim that we should not use the word, because it is an exclusive Muslim term for the God of Islam and can be used only by Muslims. This is a situation peculiar to Malaysia, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, Arabic-speaking Christians use the word 'Allah'.

Christians themselves are sometimes ignorant, because unless we pray in Bahasa Malaysia, we pray to 'God' in our own language. In English services, for example, nowhere do we use the word 'Allah'.

However, more than 60 per cent of Malaysian Christians only speak Bahasa Malaysia, and the word used for God in the Bahasa Malaysia Bible (Al-Kitab) since its translation in 1731, is 'Allah'. The word is used by Bumiputera Christians who only have Bahasa Malaysia as their common language in Sabah, Sarawak and peninsular Malaysia, and by the Baba community in Malacca.

### ***Historical Usage and Meaning***

1. The word 'Allah' was a term used for the supreme God in a pantheon of gods, before the revelation of Islam. The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam ed., H. A. R. Gibb & J. H. Kramer and The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, ed. John L. Esposito, both affirm and support this contention.

2. Historically, Malay-speaking Christians in South-East Asia have used 'Allah' to refer to God. The proof is as follows:

- The Kitab salat as-sawai or Christian catechisms in Malay written in 1514 and published around 1545,
- The printed version of the Gospel of Matthew in Malay by A.C. Ruyl in 1629,
- Malay-Latin Dictionary was printed in Rome in 1631 (The Dictionarium Malaicum-Latinum and Latinum - Malaicum)
- The translation of Genesis by D. Brouwerius (1662),
- M. Leijdecker's translation (1733),
- H.C. Klinkert's translation (1879),
- W.A. Bode's translation (1938), and
- The complete Malay Bible of 1731-1733 containing the word 'Allah' for God.

3. Therefore, from the very beginning, the word 'Allah' has been used in the liturgy, prayers and worship of those Christians who speak Bahasa Malaysia.

But for centuries, there has been no opposition or uproar about their use of 'Allah'.

### **Language**

Objections to the use of the word 'Allah' comes mostly from political discourse, or those who argue that the translation and usage of the word is a recent decision. This

is not true for the following reasons:

1. In Semitic languages, the word 'Allah' has been widely used in the Middle East dating back to the 5th Century BC and up to the time of the expansion of Islam and the spread of the Arabic language in the 7th century AD.
2. The translation of the Al-Kitab is not from the English translation but based on the Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible. In the Hebrew language, the word 'God' has the same root form as the Arabic language. So, when the word 'God' was first translated into Bahasa Malaysia, the translators merely followed the Arabic Christian usage and retained the word 'Allah'.
3. As stated earlier, the word 'Allah' pre-dates Islam. It is not a creation of the Muslims and its existence does not begin in the Al-Quran.

Should Christians Substitute the word 'Allah' with 'Tuhan'?

This is not possible for the following reasons :

1. In the Malay language, 'Allah' means 'God' and Tuhan means 'Lord'. As is obvious when we read the Bible, both God and Lord are used in the Bible, and both have different connotations. Therefore 'Allah' cannot be substituted by 'Tuhan'.
2. The word Tuhan has been applied to Jesus Christ and read as Tuhan Yesus.

If Christians are to substitute the word 'Allah' for Tuhan, it will render many Biblical references to God and Jesus incoherent because:

- The meaning of 'Allah' and Tuhan are different.
- This is obvious in just one example. In Isaiah chapter 41 and verse 13; also 43 : 3 and 51 : 15. "For I am the LORD, your GOD..." is translated as "Akulah TUHAN, ALLAH kamu...". (ALKITAB : Berita Baik. 2001. 2nd edition. Published by the Bible Society of Malaysia).
- It creates an absurd situation if Christians have to translate the biblical phrase 'Lord God' as Tuhan Tuhan. The repeated words Tuhan Tuhan indicates plural in Bahasa Malaysia, and creates the impression that

Christians believe in many Gods, which is unacceptable.

- Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians will not be able to affirm the deity of Jesus Christ and teach the doctrine of the Trinity as these two foundational words are essential to maintain and communicate these truths.

### ***Consequences of Banning the Word "Allah"***

1. Being denied the use of the word 'Allah' disregards the constitutional right of Malaysian citizens to freedom of religion under the Federal Constitution.

Article 11 of the Federal Constitution safeguards the right of each Malaysian to profess and practice one's religion of choice. Article 11(3) expressly provides that every religious group has the right to manage their own religious affairs.

2. In 2009, the High Court handed down a judgement allowing the Catholic Church to use the word 'Allah'. The government (of all Malaysians, including

Christians) is appealing the judgement and it is pending.

3. There have been other infringements on the right to use words imperative in the Bahasa Malaysia Bible. See the directive of 5 Dec 1986 from the Ministry of Home Affairs stating that, in addition to 'Allah', the words: Al-Kitab, Firman, Rasul, Iman, Ibadah, Injil, Wahyu, Nabi, Syukur, Solat and doa are not to be used in the Al-Kitab. In addition, making such prohibitions through fatwa render them only relevant to Muslims as the Shari'a does not apply to non-Muslims.

4. Prohibiting the use of the word 'Allah' and these other terms is unjust. Bumiputera Christians should be given the respect and freedom to call God in the only language they have in common. This is important to their religious and cultural identity.

5. If Churches in Malaysia agree to stop using the word 'Allah', it means that the right to edit the Scripture of a major world religion has been given over to a secular government. This would be a shameful and an unprecedented development for any religion and government.

### ***Conclusion***

Some Muslims have claimed repeatedly that Christians in Malaysia refuse to stop using the word 'Allah' because they want to confuse and convert Muslims, thereby posing a

threat to national security. The claim is groundless as there has been no evidence offered of any threat to security. These remain unfounded accusations.

On the contrary, such an assertion is made in ignorance of the fact that when Christians use the Al-Kitab, it is simply for Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians.

Malaysian Churches have never suggested changing the words 'God' and 'Lord' to 'Allah' and 'Tuhan' respectively, in the other languages of the Bible.

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## **Malaysia court upholds 'Allah' ban for non-Muslims**

The Huffington Post (23.06.2014) - Malaysia's top court weighed in Monday on the country's longstanding fight over the word "Allah," saying non-Muslims cannot use it to refer to God. But the government said hours later the judgment applied only to one newspaper at the center of the case, adding still more confusion to a deeply divisive debate over religious freedom in the Muslim-majority country.

In a 4-3 ruling, the Federal Court upheld a government ban on the use of the word Allah by non-Muslims in a case against The Herald, a Catholic Malay-language weekly. The court did not elaborate on the implication of its ruling, but the government issued a tersely worded statement saying it only applied to The Herald and that Malaysian Christians can still use the word Allah in churches.

The government statement appeared to be an attempt to diffuse tensions in the nation of 29 million people, including a large non-Muslim minority that has often complained that it is treated unfairly in jobs and education and is denied full freedom of religion.

Government officials declined to clarify whether the ban would apply to Bibles and other published texts, as appeared to be the case in last year's ruling by the Court of Appeals that banned The Herald from using Allah. The church had asked the Federal Court to overturn the ban, but the court decided not to hear the challenge, declaring that the lower court's decision had been correct.

Earlier this year, 300 Malay-language Bibles containing the word Allah were seized by Islamic authorities from the office of a Christian group.

"We are disappointed. The four judges who denied us the right to appeal did not touch on fundamental basic rights of minorities," said the Rev. Lawrence Andrew, editor of The Herald.

He said the ruling would have a chilling effect on the freedom of religion guaranteed in the constitution.

"It will confine the freedom of worship," he said. "We are a minority in this country, and when our rights are curtailed, people feel it."

The law doesn't clearly stipulate the penalty for violating the ban, but it appears that a newspaper using the term would lose its publishing license.

The government says Allah should be reserved exclusively for Muslims, who account for nearly two-thirds of the population, arguing that if other religions use the term, it could confuse Muslims and lead them to convert away from Islam.

Christian leaders deny this, arguing that the ban is unreasonable because Christians who speak the Malay language have long used the word in their Bibles, prayers and songs. Christians make up about 9 percent of the population.

"This is a sad state of affairs that shows how far and fast religious tolerance is falling in Malaysia," said Phil Robertson, a spokesman for New York-based Human Rights Watch. "The Malaysian government should be working to promote freedom of religion rather than politically exploiting religious wedge issues."

The controversy has provoked violence in Malaysia.

Anger over a lower court ruling against the government ban in 2009 led to a string of arson attacks and vandalism at churches and other places of worship. The 2013 judgment by the Court of Appeals reversed that decision.

An umbrella group of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches in Malaysia said Christians will continue to use the word Allah in their Bibles and worship, saying the court ruling was only confined to the Catholic newspaper.

"We maintain that the Christian community continues to have the right to use the word 'Allah' in our Bibles, church services and Christian gatherings," the Rev. Eu Hong Seng, chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia, said in a statement.

Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein told reporters he welcomed the ruling, but said he hoped no groups would politicize the matter and use it to divide races.

"This is an emotional issue that can affect the country's (racial) harmony. We must handle it with wisdom," he said. "The court has made a decision, so let's accept it."

Some experts believe the Allah issue is an attempt by Prime Minister Najib Razak's ruling Malay party to strengthen its conservative Muslim voter base. Religion has become an easy tool because government policies have made Islam and Malay identity inseparable.

"This is a situation that is peculiar to Malaysia. It is tied to politics and the identity of Malays. It is a bending of the interpretation of Islam to suit Malay politics and Malay interests," said Ibrahim Suffian, who heads the Merdeka Center opinion research company.

The issue hasn't surfaced in other Muslim-majority nations with sizeable Christian minorities.

In Egypt, where at least 10 percent of the population is Christian, both Muslims and Christians refer to God as Allah, and this hasn't generated any controversy or antagonism. Christians often refer to God as "al-Rab" in their liturgy, but use Allah more frequently in their daily life.

The same is true for Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation. Both groups use Allah — although Christians pronounce it "Al-lah" and Muslims say "Al-loh," — and this hasn't caused friction.

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## **Malaysia: 'Enforcement officers' from Islamic Religious Department arrest 41 Ahmadis in Selangor**

***According to the statement, some local media reporters disguised as 'enforcement officers' may have been part of the raid team.***

Ahmadiyya Times (12.04.2014) - The members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Malaysia say they are shocked and saddened at the "very blatant attempt" by the Islamic Religious Department to stop Ahmadis from performing their Friday prayers.

The Community issued a press statement earlier today describing the raid and mistreatment community members suffered at the hands of the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) during an incursion into the Ahmadiyya prayer center at Jumaa (Friday) prayers in Selangor state.

Reportedly, some 30 JAIS 'enforcement officers' descended upon the Ahmadiyya Salat Center at Dolomite Park Avenue, Jalan Batu Caves, with a search warrant and ransacked the place citing reports of activity deemed unauthorized by the Islamic Religious Department.

The religious police officers arrested 41 Ahmadi members who had just completed their Friday prayers and drove most of the detainees to the JAIS headquarters in Shah Alam, some 50km away. Four members were brought to a nearby JAIS office in Gombak.

The Ahmadiyya Imam and Missionary of the mosque was taken separately to a nearby police station and then to the JAIS headquarters at Shah Alam, where his statement was taken down and a notice to appear in court on 23rd October 2014 was issued to him.

Other detainees were also given future dates to appear before the authorities and give their statements.

According to the statement, some local media reporters disguised as 'enforcement officers' may have been part of the raid team.

"Several reporters who claimed to be JAIS officers but who we suspected were from the Harian Metro Malay language newspaper took video recording and photographs of the raid," the statement reported.

"[T]he raid [news] is published in Harian Metro and a video recording of the raid has been uploaded onto the YouTube."

The community maintains the whole incident smacks of an attempt to prevent them from observing their religious rituals and to deny them their religious freedom.

"This is a sorry state of affairs in Selangor, the most developed state in Malaysia," the statement further stated. "It is also shameful that this is happening in Malaysia, which wants to portray itself as a modern, progressive and exemplary Islamic state."

The community called on all Malaysians "who have eyes and hearts for justice" to give them the moral support against further attacks on the freedom of religion in the country.

(The Statement was issued under the signatures of Ainul Yakin M.Zain, Public Relations Officer, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Malaysia.)

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## **Molotov cocktails and banners against churches. Malaysian priest warns of escalating sectarian divisions**

***Two rudimentary bombs hurled at the Church of the Assumption in Padang overnight, only one exploded but caused no casualties or injuries. Yesterday derogatory banners hung outside three churches in the area . Fr. Lawrence : Catholics must be free to worship. Even Malaysia at risk of Islamization***

Asia News (27.01.2014) - Two men on a motorcycle threw two Molotov cocktails at the church of the Assumption in Penang last night, only one of which exploded without causing serious damage or injuries . However, the gesture adds to concerns about a possible escalation of tensions between the Muslim majority and the Catholic community , already heightened by the controversy concerning the use of the word " Allah " to describe the Christian God.

The attack is reminiscent of the wave of sectarian violence that hit the country in 2010, with dozens of churches and other places of worship (whether Christian or not) the target of terrorist attacks or acts of vandalism. The bomb attacks followed derogatory banners appearing outside three different churches in Penang with the inscription: "Allah is great, Jesus is the son of Allah." So far no one has claimed responsibility for the act, which has raised outrage among religious leaders in the area.

Local sources believe it is an attempt to provoke Christians using the tactic of "reverse psychology".

Malaysian police have opened an investigation into the events of yesterday and last night. The Interior Minister Ahmad Zahid is appealing for calm and hopes that "Christian and Muslim" leaders are able to maintain control and prevent further violence. "I invite each of you, individuals or groups - he added - not to give in to these provocative acts. What matters is harmony between religions".

The attack on the church and the provocative banners come in the wake of renewed controversy over the use of the word "Allah" for non-Muslims, which began following the confrontation - that ended up in a court case - between the editor of the Catholic weekly, *the Herald*, and the government. Last October, a judgment of the Court of Appeal effectively denied the Catholic weekly directed by Fr . Lawrence the right to print the word "Allah" when describing the Christian God. The priest then requested to appeal the sentence. In Malaysia, out of a population of more than 28 million people, the majority (60 per cent) are Muslim, followed by Buddhists. Christians constitute the third largest group numbering around 2.6 million. A few years ago, a 400-year-old Latin-Malay dictionary was re-issued. It shows that Allah was used in the Bible as the word for God in the local language.

Meanwhile, Fr. Lawrence is returning to the fray after a brief period of silence following his police interrogation of 7 January by the police and a possible indictment . In a lengthy interview *Eglise d'Asie* ( EDA ), the 68-year old priest said that the controversy is indicative of a "radicalization " of Malaysian society in place since the 70's and which was intensified in the recent past. The "racial" or "ethnic" divisions have become "a way of life, a very common way of being in the country." In this context, he adds, "it is better not to talk about religion" and it is no longer even customary for Muslims to wish Christians "Merry Christmas".

In view of the hearing on 5 March , Fr. Lawrence anticipates that "the verdict will be respected ," but the central point is that "Catholics in Malaysia should be able to continue to celebrate and pray in the Malay language".

Similarly, the Bible must continue to be printed in the local language, called "Al- Kitab " (The Book , ed.). In fact, Christians are banned from using 35 words of "common use", and this impediment "constitutes a blatant violation of religious freedom" guaranteed by the Constitution but disregarded in practice. In Malaysia, as in other parts of the world, there is a radical growth of extremist Islam and the youth of the minorities are increasingly encouraged to emigrate, to find greater space (and freedom) in more tolerant societies. "mong the Muslim-majority nations and in comparison with what is happening in the Middle East - said the priest - Malaysia is no exception in this respect".

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## **Malaysia's Islamic authorities seize Bibles as Allah row deepens**

Reuters (02.01.2014) - Islamic authorities in Malaysia on Thursday seized 321 Bibles from a Christian group because they used the word Allah to refer to God, signalling growing intolerance that may inflame ethnic and religious tension in the Southeast Asian country.

The raid comes after a Malaysian court in October ruled that the Arabic word was exclusive to Muslims, most of whom are ethnic Malays, the largest ethnic group in the country alongside sizeable Christian, Hindu and Buddhist minorities.

That ruling overturned a court decision that allowed a Roman Catholic newspaper printed in Malay, the country's national language, to use Allah.

The change has heightened concern that religious authorities, which issue rulings for Muslims and operate alongside civil courts, now have more legal muscle.

Analysts say new rulings that affect non-Muslims could be a way of deflecting anger against Prime Minister Najib Razak's government from poor Malay Muslims over subsidy cuts likely to force up electricity, petrol and sugar prices.

On Thursday, the top Islamic authority in the richest and most populous state of Selangor seized the Malay-language Bibles from the Bible Society. The society said authority officials escorted two of its officials to a police station to make statements after which they were released on bail.

"We were told that we were under investigation for breaking a Selangor state law banning non-Muslims from using the word Allah," said Bible Society of Malaysia Chairman Lee Min Choon.

The raid is a marked escalation from the occasional seizure at border checkpoints of Bibles imported from Indonesia. It was the first time Islamic authorities have entered premises belonging to a Christian organisation to carry out a raid.

Christians from Malaysia's rural states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo, who have used the word Allah for centuries, have moved in droves to Selangor and other parts of peninsular Malaysia in recent years to look for work.

## ***Bad elements***

The main political party within Najib's ruling coalition, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), said its Selangor members would protest at all churches in the state on Sunday against unauthorised use of the word Allah.

"There are laws in Selangor and there was a decree by his Royal Highness the Sultan. So what they are doing is carrying out the Sultan's decree," Deputy Prime Minister and UMNO Deputy President Muhyiddin Yassin was quoted by media as saying.

"They are not doing anything against the law."

The Sultan of Selangor, one of nine sultans who serve in turn as titular Malaysian head of state, decreed last year that non-Muslims must refrain from using Allah in Bibles. He asked Muslims to unite against "bad elements" that misuse the word.

The increasingly assertive stand by holders of the largely ceremonial office show that Muslim leaders have become increasingly vocal about their role in defending Islam.

In 2010, arsonists firebombed several churches over the initial ruling that allowed the Catholic newspaper to use the Arabic word. Two Malay men were found guilty for setting fire to one of the churches.

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