

## **Umno trying to milk 'Allah' row, says WSJ**

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Influential international business newspaper Wall Street Journal (WSJ) has accused Umno of fanning religious tensions in Malaysia for political gain.

In an editorial today, WSJ said the Umno-led government had, of late, gone on an "unnecessary" and "provocative" push to ban non-Muslims from using the word 'Allah'.

Among others, the article said public statements from both Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin (left), are adding fuel to the controversy.

"Touting such views is a convenient way for Umno to steer public discourse away from corruption and clean elections.

"These concerns helped the opposition coalition win the popular vote last year for the first time since independence.

"Even the Islamist wing of the opposition, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), has focused on good governance rather than using the 'Allah' controversy to score political points.

"It insists that the minority religions' use of 'Allah' is their constitutional right," read the article.

'Drop sedition probe'

However, WSJ said that attempts by Umno to flaunt its Islamic credentials have not appealed to its increasingly urban electorate.

Citing findings by independent pollster Merdeka Centre, WSJ noted that the federal government's overall public approval rate had dropped from 50 percent to 38 percent in early December 2013, with the steepest drop being recorded among the Malay respondents.

More worryingly, said WSJ, was how Umno's stand on the issue had seem to galvanise conservative extremist groups, citing how churches and temples were

vandalised after the 'Allah' ban was briefly reversed in 2010.

Meanwhile, WSJ also urged Putrajaya to drop sedition investigations against Lawrence Andrew (left), a Catholic priest and editor of Catholic publication The Herald.

The police began its probe on Andrew after he said on Dec 27, 2013 that Catholics will continue to use the term 'Allah' despite a ban put in place by Putrajaya and various state laws that offer the same effect.

WSJ argued that non-Muslims in Malaysia have been using the term for 200 years.

"Malaysia's leaders would be wise to note this shift and drop the investigation of Father Andrew.

"Depriving religious minorities of their rights isn't in the long-term interest of Malaysia or Umno," read the article.

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