

## **Bishop: Ibrahim Ali crossed a red line**

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Catholic bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing said Ibrahim Ali's threat to burn Malay-language bibles containing the term 'Allah' had crossed a red line and the government's refusal to hold the Perkasa chief to account had shot its cases of sedition against other putative transgressors to pieces.

"Sedition as I understand it is an incitement to something violent and disruptive of peace," said the head of the Catholic Church in the Malacca-Johor diocese.

"Threatening to burn the sacred scripture of religions is as incendiary a call as you could get in multi-religious country," argued the Jesuit-trained prelate.

"The government's explanation that Ibrahim had given vent to that incitement in defence of Islam is warped logic. You don't defend your religion by urging that the sacred books of others ought to be consigned to the flames," he expatiated.

Bishop Paul (right) said the government was in the grip of a mania where speech ranging from dissenting opinions to the milder forms of ethnic and religious discourtesies were being investigated and prosecuted for seditious tendencies.

"How can, then, a threat to burn bibles be exempted from this prosecution mania on the grounds that it was uttered in defence of Islam?" queried the bishop.

"Not being Muslim, I can't say with certainty what is Islamic or what is not, but given my understanding of how Muslims regard their scripture, it is logical they would look askance at threats to burn the sacred texts of other religions," he said.

"In declining to hold Ibrahim to account for crossing a definite red line, the government has shot its cases of sedition against others to pieces," he asserted.

'Outrage'

Bishop Paul backed the reaction of the Christian Federation of Malaysia which expressed "outrage" at the explanation given by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nancy Shukri that action was not taken by the government against Ibrahim Ali because his Bible-burning threat was seen as "defending the sanctity of Islam".

CFM chairperson Eu Hong Seng denounced the explanation as rendering "carte blanche or free rein" to extremists to continue issuing such threats either to Christians or followers of any other religion.

"I fully endorse the urging by the CFM chairperson to Malaysians to censure the minister for the shameful extenuations she has given on Ibrahim's behalf," opined Bishop Paul.

He said enlightened opinion in the Muslim world continues to hold that the term 'Allah' is not exclusive to Muslims and that Arab Christians and Jews employed used the term even before the advent of Islam.

Bishop Paul is also in full agreement with the protest from the Christians from Sabah and Sarawak.

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