

**Dr M: Ibrahim Ali not Umno spokesman**  
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**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 1 — Datuk Ibrahim Ali may support Umno but does not speak for the party, Perkasa patron Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said in a bid to defuse religious tension ahead of Election 2013 sparked by the right-wing Malay lawmaker's Bible-burning threat, the latest sprung over the "Allah" controversy.

The vocal Ibrahim, Perkasa's founder and president, had sparked a firestorm last week when he reportedly called on Muslims to torch Malay-language copies of the Christian holy book that describes the Christian god as "Allah", an Arabic word many Muslims here believe to be exclusive to their community.

"It is unfortunate that Ibrahim Ali should suggest burning the newly-printed bibles. That may be the way we rid ourselves of unwanted publications. It cannot be done for the Bible any more than it can be done for the Quran," Dr Mahathir **(picture)** wrote in his chedet.cc blog posting last night.

"But what Ibrahim said does not reflect the views of Umno. Unfortunately, some politicians would like to make it so in order to gain political mileage," the former prime minister added.

Dr Mahathir, who still wields much clout within Umno, was quick to stress that the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition's lynchpin party believed "Allah" to be exclusive to Islam but "it had never advocated burning the Malay-language bibles which uses this word".

"I regard the attempt to imply Ibrahim's support for Umno to mean what he says is what is subscribed to by Umno as mischievous.

"Ibrahim is not a member of Umno. He may support Umno but he is not a spokesman for Umno," said the party's ex-president.

Dr Mahathir, who had in 2011 advised Umno not to make an enemy of Perkasa if it wanted to win back the crucial Malay vote lost in Election 2008, appeared to be distancing himself from the group's combative stand.

"While we can have political differences, we should not resort to our religious differences to win elections. It is a double-edged sword and those who live by the sword shall die by the sword.

"Let this controversy be settled behind closed doors by responsible people. Let not the extremists take over and exploit religious issues," he said and appealed to all parties to stop their "abuse" of the inflammatory issue.

The country's longest-serving prime minister of 22 years gave a reminder that the "Allah" controversy had been settled years ago "through the acceptance that the Christians of Sabah and Sarawak could continue to use the word Allah in their Malay-language bible and teachings but these should not be used in the rest of the country".

The 87-year-old had been instrumental in heading off a potential faith crisis from erupting over the word when the "Allah" dispute first arose in the early 1980s — shortly after he took office as prime minister.

Muslim and Christian leaders here have been at loggerheads over use of "Allah" despite a 2009 High Court judgment that ruled Muslims did not have an exclusive right to the Arabic word.

Muslims are Malaysia's biggest religious group at 60 per cent, while the minority Christians, who form just under 10 per cent of the 28 million total population, have been at the forefront of issues confronting the non-Muslim community, which are provided for under the country's constitution.

Debate resurfaced last December after DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, who is also the Penang chief minister, called on Putrajaya to lift a ban on Malay-language bibles in Sabah and Sarawak, where the "Allah" word had been in use for centuries.

A Sabah church group has also alleged that the religious freedom of Christian Bumiputeras was under attack, pointing out that most adherents of the faith in Malaysia came from east Malaysia and used the Malay language.

A Buddhist group has urged the National Unity and Integration Department, which is under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department, to resolve the drawn-out dispute over the usage of "Allah".

The Malaysian Islamic Development Department also upset church leaders with its sermon last Friday in which it warned Muslims nationwide of "enemies of Islam" that would try to confuse them into believing that all religions share the same god.

Retired Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman has urged the authorities to speed up action against Ibrahim over his Bible-burning threat, saying any further delay in acting against the veteran politician could be held against the establishment ahead of Election 2013.

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