

Dr M: PAS using 'Allah' as vote bait
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 3 — PAS has politicised religion and is using "Allah" to fish for votes in Election 2013, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today, warning of intra-faith tension despite Muslim Malaysians all being from the Sunni Islam school.

The former prime minister noted that unlike Islam's followers elsewhere in the world who were split between two schools of thought, Muslims in Malaysia all followed only the Sunni doctrine, but highlighted that certain political parties were exploiting religion for secular gain.

"The word 'Allah' has already been used to fish for votes. Because of the wish to get the votes of certain groups in the elections, it is stated that the word 'Allah' can be used by anyone," he wrote in his Sunday column in Malay broadsheet, *Mingguan Malaysia*.

"But then when they fear they are unable to get the other votes, so easily is it stated that the word 'Allah' cannot be used apart from in the religion of Islam.

"When asked why previously they said it could be used, the reply is that it is ridiculous. The PAS Mursyidul Am admits it's ridiculous," he added.

Dr Mahathir's **(picture)** diatribe appeared to centre on PAS' Datuk Abdul Nik Aziz Nik Mat who is the party's mursyidul am, or spiritual adviser, whom he had earlier in his article accused of being more concerned with secular achievements than religious matters.

He highlighted as an example Nik Aziz's 82nd birthday celebrations last month at the house of DAP chairman, Karpal Singh, who is an ally in the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition bloc but has staunchly defended the right of non-Muslims to call their gods "Allah", a word many Muslims here believe to be exclusive to Islam.

The dispute over the use of the word "Allah", which erupted four years ago, shortly after Election 2008, continues to rage in the run-up to the 13th general elections, which must be called by April when the Barisan Nasional (BN) federal government's mandate expires.

Dr Mahathir said that elections provide an opportunity to seek power and monetary profit and have driven a wedge between Malaysia's Muslim majority.

"To get worldly benefits, religion has been manipulated. And so begins accusations that Umno people are purportedly infidels to get the support of certain Malays in the elections," the 87-year-old said.

In Malaysia, the Malays, who formed 60 per cent of the 28 million population, are constitutionally defined to also be Muslims, which is why race and religion are treated as inseparable issues in the country.

The former president of Umno — the ruling BN's mainstay whose views still carry weight within the party — highlighted that the split between Muslims in PAS and Umno had given rise to separate worship, animal slaughter and even burial plots, adding that he foresees a greater divide within the community.

"Islam will be more polluted in the future by Muslims themselves," he said.

"If this is joined by non-Muslims, then there will be tension in relations among the races and riots in Malaysia," he said, adding that it may resemble war-stricken nations where the Muslims were separated into Shiah and Sunni, as well as those of other faiths.

"Truly there is nothing more dangerous than enmity because of religion," said Dr Mahathir.

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