

**What will it be for BN — Ibrahim Ali or 1 Malaysia?
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By Jahabar Sadiq**

COMMENT, April 8 — The Barisan Nasional (BN) has unveiled a centrist manifesto that fits its 1 Malaysia philosophy but Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's endorsement of Datuk Ibrahim Ali as a coalition candidate would appear to be at odds with the concept.

The stout Perkasa chief has been anything but centrist or even 1 Malaysia in his approach to push for Malay rights at a time when BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak has been advocating a gradual economic liberalisation and equity for Malaysians.

But why would the country's longest-serving prime minister, who spoke in 1991 of a future Bangsa Malaysia plump, for an ethno-centric Ibrahim (picture), who ran on a PAS ticket in Election 2008 only to turn pro-Umno after winning the Pasir Mas seat?

"I hope BN will give Ibrahim Ali a spot. If he is made a candidate, I will go to Pasir Mas to campaign," Dr Mahathir pledged over the weekend, adding: "If we have more individuals like Ibrahim Ali, Malaysia will be safe."

Is Dr Mahathir promoting the Ibrahim Ali who threatened to burn Malay-language bibles? The Ibrahim Ali who wanted guaranteed Bumiputera involvement in infrastructure projects even after Putrajaya said it must be on merit.

How safe will Malaysia be with Ibrahim still in politics? Or is this a joke?

One thing can be said about Dr Mahathir. He backs his men. He backed Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik in his corruption trial. And he is now backing Ibrahim whom he once made a deputy minister in charge of law.

Dr Mahathir is also Perkasa's patron. After all, Ibrahim has been the veteran politician's attack man from the time he ended Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's political career in Umno and the government.

And Ibrahim could also be useful if the need arises to shake up the top Umno leadership in the event BN performs poorly in the closest election ever.

Both also share a dislike for Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Ibrahim left Umno after Abdullah became party president and prime minister. But Ibrahim has been in and out of political parties, earning the sobriquet "Katak" or frog.

But the simple fact is that both Dr Mahathir and Ibrahim probably resonate with old-style Umno members and voters, who believe in personalities not policies. And not with the new and younger voters who seek a better Malaysia through inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.

BN will have to think long and deep about Dr Mahathir's advice to consider giving Ibrahim a seat under its banner. Because Malaysia is made up of more than just the apparently 400,000-strong Perkasa seeking Malay rights already enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

Four years of 1 Malaysia has shown how much BN can gain by keeping to a moderate and

centrist path. Any deviation to the fringes will lose them votes, despite the brimming ideas in their manifesto.

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