

BN must ignore Dr M on Ibrahim Ali or risk backlash, say analysts
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 – Political analysts have said Barisan Nasional (BN)'s image would be tarnished if it picks Datuk Ibrahim Ali as a candidate in Election 2013, indicating that it would be best for the ruling coalition's chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak to ignore Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to do so.

Prof Dr Jayum A. Jawan, from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), said Dr Mahathir should remain as a statesman instead of meddling in BN's political affairs, while also saying: "The best approach is for Najib to ignore the statement."

He said there would be a "very negative effect" and "backlash" from the voters if Najib and BN takes Dr Mahathir's advice to field the controversial Malay-rights leader.

He said Ibrahim's brand of politics would not go down well in Malaysia's multiracial society, referring to his Malay right-wing group Perkasa.

But Jayum disagreed that Dr Mahathir's statement alone would cause a drop in voter support for BN, pointing out that he was no longer the coalition's leader, while also highlighting the fact that Ibrahim is not a member of BN or Umno.

"So to me, it's not fair to associate it with Najib and BN," he said, saying that it would be a different scenario if Najib personally endorsed Ibrahim (picture).

Another analyst, Wan Saiful Wan Jan, said it was "really unfortunate to hear Tun Mahathir saying that because Najib has been trying to push Umno and BN forward in the sense it is not too restricted on ethnic lines."

"Having any candidate that takes a very strong ethnic line will damage the potential of any political party," the chief executive officer for Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) said.

Dr Arnold Puyok, a Sabah-based political analyst, said that "Dr Mahathir's support for Ibrahim Ali does not bode well for Najib's approach."

"It will certainly affect Najib's image as an inclusive leader and the watassiyah concept BN is promoting. Ibrahim Ali's bible-burning remark has hurt the non-Muslims," he said, suggesting that having Ibrahim would affect the non-Muslims support in BN.

Puyok was referring to Ibrahim's recent controversial statement to burn Malay-language bibles which contain the word "Allah", which had led to an uproar among the non-Muslim community.

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)'s Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani suggested that Dr Mahathir's call was part of Ibrahim's attempt to manoeuvre his way into a nomination for the virtually Malay

parliamentary seat in Kelantan.

He said that the independent MP would find it hard to win in Pasir Mas against PAS and Umno, also pointing out that PAS was unlikely to allow Ibrahim to contest under its ticket again as it did in 2008.

But Ibrahim could be a "winnable candidate" if he contests under BN's ticket, the academic said, pointing to factors such as his incumbency and the support of Dr Mahathir, which will in turn cause the party machinery there to campaign for him.

Azizuddin conceded that there was an inconsistency between Ibrahim's Perkasa agenda and BN's 1 Malaysia concept, but said it is acceptable within the Umno circle, as the Malay party had both conservative and moderate members among its ranks.

He said that if Ibrahim is nominated as a BN candidate, the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) would use it as ammunition against the coalition.

He also said there would be protest among the people and even from BN component parties such as MCA and Gerakan who are "totally against" Ibrahim's agenda.

Last Saturday, former prime minister Dr Mahathir urged the coalition he previously led to field Ibrahim, promising to campaign for him.

"I hope BN will give Ibrahim Ali a spot. If he is made a candidate, I will go to Pasir Mas to campaign," he pledged.

"If we have more individuals like Ibrahim Ali, Malaysia will be safe."

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