

Corruption a core electoral issue for Christians, say church leaders
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By Boo Su-Lyn

KUALA LUMPUR, April 26 — Christians will vote against corruption and social injustice in Election 2013, besides calling for religious freedom in multi-racial Malaysia, church leaders said today.

They also said that Datuk Seri Najib Razak's support for the appeal to reverse a High Court ruling allowing Christians to use the Arabic word "Allah" contradicted his 2011 resolution granting east Malaysian Christians the freedom to do so.

"The question that begs to be answered is whether the 10-point solution decided by him and the Cabinet is still valid?" Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) chairman Rev Dr Eu Hong Seng told The Malaysian Insider today, referring to the caretaker prime minister.

"Before the GE, the Church is looking at a broad spectrum of issues — corruption, improvement to the economic well-being of people, freedom of religion, men of integrity to be our future MPs. I think Christians at large in Malaysia, whether east or west, we share the same strong sentiments about corruption," added the head of the ecumenical umbrella body that represents 90 per cent of Malaysia's roughly two million Christians.

The Christian community forms about a quarter of Sabah's population and almost half of Sarawak's population, where they mainly worship in Bahasa Malaysia church services and read Malay-language bibles.

Najib told global news station Al Jazeera in an interview, to be aired tomorrow, that he supported the government appeal against the 2009 High Court ruling that allowed non-Muslims to use the word "Allah", saying that the Muslims have a different concept of Allah than the Christians.

An excerpt of the interview was obtained and reported by The Malaysian Insider this morning.

Before the Sarawak state election in 2011, Najib's administration came up with a 10-point formula to resolve the issue of shipments of Malay-language bibles, which cater to Bumiputera Christians, that were blocked and confiscated before they were subsequently released by the government.

In the 10-point resolution, the Cabinet, through its minister Datuk Seri Idris Jala, assured the sizeable Bumiputera Christian population in Sabah and Sarawak that they were free to bring in and use their bibles in Malay as well as in indigenous languages.

Jala declined to comment today when asked about Najib's backing for the appeal against the High Court ruling.

The Court of Appeal has fixed May 30 for another case management on the government and Home Ministry's appeal against the 2009 High Court decision that the word "Allah" can be used by the Catholic weekly newspaper Herald.

Several places of worship nationwide, including churches, mosques and a gurdwara, were

firebombed and desecrated after the High Court ruling, sparking tension between the Muslims — who form the majority of Malaysia's population — and the Christian minority.

Christians comprise about nine per cent of the country's 28 million population.

Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) general-secretary Rev Dr Hermen Shastri said Najib was "contradicting himself".

"He's the one who signed the 10-point agreement for Christians in Sabah and Sarawak in 2011," he told The Malaysian Insider.

"Corruption is prevalent here and in east Malaysia. We are going to vote for an accountable government that protects the rights of all Malaysians as provided in the constitution. And this constitution has been made relevant to all sectors of Malaysian society, which include the rights of marginalised people, rights of workers, equality before the law, and one among them is religious freedom," added Shastri.

CCM, an umbrella body of Protestant churches, released a video recently that urged Christians to vote for a corruption-free country where all Malaysians are treated as equals and where there is religious freedom.

Shastri said Christians were praying now until the May 5 polls for a "clean and fair election".

Sabah's Christian UPKO president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok did not respond to calls or text messages asking for comment.

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