

In engaging issues, the stark difference between PAS, PKR and Umno
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Weeks ahead of their respective party elections, both PAS and PKR are showing their willingness to engage in issues that are political hot potatoes in Malaysia while some Umno leaders continue to be mired in scandals.

The stark difference between the Malay-based parties reflect the confidence of the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) component parties to bridge the growing divide among Malaysia's communities and Umno's inability to rid itself of scandal-ridden leaders.

Parit Buntar MP Datuk Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa of PAS and PKR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim have continued engaging the country's Christian community amid simmering tension over the Christians using the word "Allah" to describe their God.

Mujahid has gone ahead to organise Christian-Muslim dialogues with the latest at a church in Penang two nights ago despite protests.

"We did not discuss theological differences or any other argument but simply about what can be done to heal relationships," he said.

He said such dialogues will continue whatever the outcome of the court decision on the use of the term "Allah" by Christians.

"We are not here to sell the Muslim faith nor buy the faith of others," said the second-term PAS MP who has visited at least 30 churches nationwide in the wake of the dispute on the word "Allah".

Anwar, making an announcement that could damage his standing among Muslim Malaysians, said two days ago that he would meet Pope Francis I during a dialogue session being organised with leaders of several faiths in Rome soon.

He asked for understanding over the meeting and explained the Pope requested to meet with several delegates for a discussion and he would be among them.

"There was no problem when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak or former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad met the Pope," he said, in a reference to Najib's meeting with Pope Benedict XVI two years ago.

"But if I do, it would (be seen as) a mistake. The difference is, I did not ask to meet him.

"They might say I want to convert to Christianity. This is our problem, which is why we continue to fight for freedom, democracy, and change," he said.

On the flip side, another Umno political aide is being investigated for corruption and several luxury cars have been seized in a repeat of scandals that have blighted the dominant party in the ruling Barisan Nasional.

The man was a political secretary at the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry when it was headed by Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

He is being investigated by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) for allegedly misappropriating funds meant for the poor under the government's 1AZAM (Akhiri Zaman Miskin) programme.

It is learnt that the MACC seized 10 luxury vehicles belonging to him, including a Toyota Alphard, Volkswagen Golf GTI, Toyota Vellfire and Toyota Camry.

The 1AZAM programme is a government initiative under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development which has spent RM1.35 billion so far to provide aid to 473,928 recipients nationwide.

Shahrizat lost her ministerial post when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak did not renew her senatorship in March 2012 after her family was linked to the mismanagement of funds in the National Feedlot Centre project.

She did not contest in the May 5 general election but is defending her Wanita Umno chief's position and has received a boost with another appointment, this time as an adviser to Najib on women entrepreneurship issues last month. – September 18, 2013.

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