

**Onus on Umno to reassure Malays on Islam, ST says**  
**The Malay Mail Online**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 4 — As the Barisan Nasional (BN) lynchpin, Umno should convince the Malays that Islam is not under any threat in Malaysia, despite repeated claims of a Christian plot against the Muslims, Singapore's *The Straits Times* said today.

The island state's leading English daily cited Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's evaluation of religious tensions here as cause for concern, saying the opposition leader's warning that things have reached a “dangerous crescendo” should be heeded and not dismissed as mere grandstanding.

The paper said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's expected formation of a bipartisan platform to iron out national issues like the “Allah” row is a much-needed effort, in the wake of recent events like the firebombing at a Penang church.

Religious chiefs should also opt in on these efforts at fostering national unity, the ST wrote in an editorial today, as they have as much duty as politicians in restraining violence and emotion from among their followers.

“Rabble-rousers are a minority but their numbers could grow,” the paper warned.

Malaysia is currently grappling with an intractable religious conflict between Muslims and Christians over “Allah”, the Arabic word for God, which culminated in two Molotov cocktails being thrown at a church in Penang last week, just as how houses of worship were attacked in 2010 over the same issue.

The issue worsened after Selangor Islamic authorities moved to enforce the state enactment that it insists bars non-Muslims from using “Allah” by raiding the premises of a Christian society in Petaling Jaya and carting off over 300 Iban and Malay language bibles.

The incident placed Muslims and Christians on opposing sides once again and threw the Selangor government into a legal quandary as it struggled to find a binding resolution to end the row.

Following growing friction over communal and religious issues that even resulted in warnings of a possible repeat of the bloody racial riots of May 13, 1969, the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition pact reached out to BN for bipartisan efforts to cool down tempers in the country.

PR de facto chief Anwar said the pact was willing to engage BN to arrive at a so-called “National Consensus”, which Najib agreed to raise at the Cabinet level after pointing out that his offer of national reconciliation was rejected during the aftermath of Election 2013.

According to ST, racial harmony in Malaysia has been disturbed largely because of the competitive tension arising from the emerging two-party system.

The paper said Najib, regarded as among one of Umno's more progressive leaders, has been under siege from the conservative wing of Umno - an observation that has often been raised along with warnings of a possible revolt against the Umno chief.

But ST said if left unchecked, the current tensions could undermine racial and national unity in multiracial Malaysia.

"It is up to the leadership," the paper said, "...to convince Malay Malaysians as a whole that Islam is not under threat."

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