

As Bible-burning threat ebbs, Penang bishop meets Muslim spiritual leader

Ibrahim Ali, head of a Malay Muslim supremacist group, wanted to burn the Christian holy text because it contained the word Allah in its Malay edition. Various Muslim leaders denounce him for "sowing hatred against Christians".



Kuala Lumpur (AsiaNews (<http://www.asianews.it/>) 28 January 2013) - Members of an Islamic group that had announced that it would burn Bibles did not show up for the event. Recently, anonymous flyers had begun circulating, in which Muslims were urged to participate in a festival where copies of a Malay edition of the Bible would be burnt because they contained the word 'Allah', which in their view was a strictly Islamic term.

The flyers began appearing after Ibrahim Ali, head of Perkasa, a Muslim Malay supremacist group, urged its members to burn copies of a Malay-language edition of the Bible. Ali made the explosive statement after he heard that Christians were handing out Malay Bibles to young Muslim students in Jelutong.

Tensions rose further when the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) was quoted as saying during Friday sermons that the "enemies of Islam" were trying to confuse Muslims by making them believe that all religions were equal.

The controversy concerns the word Allah or God, which both Muslims and Christians use. For Muslim extremists, Christians are not entitled to use the name because it is exclusive to Islam. In reality, the word is Arabic for God and Christians have used long before Islam was founded.

In Malaysia, the matter sparked an intense debate that ended in 2009 when the High Court ruled that Muslims did not have the exclusive use of the word. Yet, it regularly resurfaces, especially before elections, which is now the case since Malaysia is set to go to the polls next June.

However, various leaders of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) have come out against Ibrahim Ali and JAKIM, accusing them of sowing hatred between Muslims and Christians.

Mgr Sebastian Francis, Catholic bishop of Penang, met Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, PAS's spiritual leader, bringing a cake for his 82nd birthday.

Quoted on the PAS website, Mgr Francis said that Malaysia needed people to follow Nik Abdul Aziz's example, not Ibrahim Ali's and his provocative views.