

'I did not boycott PAS celebration'

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By Susan Loone

DAP national chairperson Karpal Singh has denied that he had boycotted PAS' 60th anniversary closing ceremony in Kepala Batas last night.

NONECiting poor health for his absence, Karpal said he had informed the DAP headquarters yesterday about his inability to attend the function where he was scheduled to address a 10,000 strong Muslim crowd.

He added that he did not absent himself from the do deliberately, nor had he intended to avoid or boycott PAS or its supporters.

PAS and DAP leaders said they were unaware of the reason behind Karpal's absence at the high profile event last night, where Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim were present.

"I had told the HQ that I was not well... no, it is not a boycott," he told reporters at a press conference in Penang today.

Pas 60th anniversary at kepala batas, penangDuring the meeting, Karpal expressed surprise at PAS' statement that he had agreed in principle to the enactment of the Syariah criminal codes (hudud) in Kelantan and Terengganu in 1993 and 2003, respectively.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang and Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz Nik Mat had both said that the DAP had agreed to the implementation of the law in both states.

'DAP stand unchanged'

Karpal, who is Bukit Gelugor MP, said contrary to that, DAP's stand had always been that the enactment was not in accordance to the federal constitution and was therefore "unconstitutional".

"That being the case, both enactments - in Kelantan and Terengganu - are null and void," he told reporters at a press conference in his Penang office today.

"This is in regard to Article 4 that decrees the Federal Constitution is the supreme law of the country," he added.

"By law, it has also been stated that any state or federal law that is not consistent with the Federal Constitution will be come null and void," he stressed.

NONEKarpal also commented on Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz Nik Mat's statement that he would pray for a two-third majority in Parliament so that the hudud can be implemented nationwide.

He said the DAP stand to that as a matter of principle will always be what it was when the party was in the opposition.

Even if Pakatan Rakyat were to obtain a two-thirds majority in parliament, the DAP would not agree to any step or amendment of the constitution to allow the law to be enacted, he added.

PAS backtracking?

Karpal stressed that PAS seems to have rescinded its resolution at the party's recent muktamar (annual meet) where it said it will not pursue its aim to establish an Islamic state.

Abdul Hadi, who is Maran MP, had said the party would pursue a welfare state, and that there was no mention of an Islamic state in the Quran.

"It is a breach of faith to revert to the party's original stand that PAS endeavours to form an Islamic state if it gains power," said Karpal.

Abdul Hadi had also assured non-Muslims that the hudud law would not be forced upon them, but would be given the option of having the code applied on them.

However, Karpal said he was not certain of how the non-Muslim community would subject themselves to the controversial law, that provides for strict punishment like the chopping of hands for theft if found guilty.

He expressed hope that in light of the coming general election, PAS would adopt and abide by its muktamar decisions.

"Unless the resolutions are rescinded, it must stand. Anything inconsistent with it cannot be PAS stand on the matter," he insisted.

Not unanimous amongst Muslims

On Anwar's speech last night that there was a sense of Islamophobia among the nation despite 54 years of Merdeka and that non-Muslims should not fear hudud as it would not be forced on them, Karpal said this was not the issue that he was concerned with.

NONE Anwar had also called for engagement to understand in detail what the hudud law entails.

"We can't have two legal systems in the country. It is not an issue of engagement.

"This concept is unconstitutional and the DAP strictly abides by the constitution, as everyone must comply by its principles," he said.

"(We have) nothing against PAS. This must be made clear, as we do agree on larger issues such as the economy and human rights" he was quick to add.

When asked if DAP was acting undemocratically as the hudud was endorsed unanimously by the Kelantan state legislative assembly, Karpal said that the party was democratic as it continues to uphold the constitution.

Each state cannot have own laws

On whether Pakatan would further lose public confidence due to the current conflict within the coalition over the hudud issue, Karpal said that the DAP had to make its stand on the matter very clear.

He insisted that DAP would not support any such amendments to the constitution to allow hudud, and that "not all Muslims support the law as well".

The veteran lawyer said that he hopes the Malay Muslim community understands the DAP's position in wanting to defend the constitution, where all states and citizens are bound to obey its principles.

Since Malaysia is a federation, each states cannot have its own laws, he added.

He also stressed that a Supreme Court decision in 1998, where a five-member panel led by the then-lord president Salleh Abas had decided that Malaysia was a secular and not an Islamic state.

He denied that he was upset with PAS for taking a step back after its commitment to the federal constitution and Pakatan's common policy framework - Buku Jingga - which is silent on the formation of Islamic state or hudud enactment.

"I am not upset, I just want to put things right".

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