

PAS keeps hardcore supporters with hudud plan
Malaysiakini.com
October 06,2011
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ANALYSIS Although PAS has managed to sidestep the Islamic state controversy by rebranding its approach to 'welfare state', the issue of its pursuit of hudud law continues to be a recurring matter.

However, this time analysts believe that the thorny issue has worked to the Islamic party's advantage, despite opening Pakatan Rakyat to continued criticism.

According to UiTM political scientist Shahrudin Badaruddin, PAS by insisting on pursuing the Islamic law, against resistance from DAP, is showing that it is holding true to its principles.

NONEThis is timely, for it addresses the anxiety that PAS is losing its hardcore supporters following claims that the party is diluting its Islamic message to fit in better with its Pakatan partners.

Further, PAS may have anxiety over losing its support among former servicemen, following the attack on party number two Mohamad Sabu, who came under BN assault for allegedly citing Mat Indera, who led the 1950 Bukit Kepong police station attack, as a hero.

"(The move to strongly pursue the hudud) is likely to get more votes from Malay-Muslims, which is important because there has been a slip, although not great, of the Malay-Muslim vote for Pakatan since 2008," Shahrudin said.

This is especially for rural voters or the "Malay-Muslim ring" consisting of the northern states of Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah and Pahang, where PAS needs to assert itself as a strong party that is consistent with its long-held ideals.

NONEConcurring, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political scientist Jayum Jawan (right) said the move "reassures" PAS hardcore supporters, without turning away non-Muslim voters, despite the resulting demonisation by BN parties.

"It won't have tremendous effect on pushing PKR or DAP supporters away because people would have expected such a move by PAS.

"An Islamic party would pursue Islamic law, but again, going into politics isn't about Islam but about winning elections," he said.

Explaining, Jayum, an expert in ethnic politics, said the issue was unlikely to cause a major rift among the Pakatan parties as their cooperation was rooted on a common enemy, that is BN.

He said that to allow PAS room to make its stand, which would benefit Pakatan as a whole in terms of Malay-Muslim electorate, DAP and PKR would need to play their role and "soften the issue".

"So we see right now second tier leaders making media statements while top rank leaders are toeing the line. That should be the way (to send the right signal)," he said.

Jayum believes that such a staunch stand on hudud also would not be detrimental to PAS' chances in Kedah, despite speculation of dissatisfaction among non-Muslims with the PAS government.

Despite announcing that it would not implement the hudud in Kedah, the government has invited

disgruntlement among Kedahans, particularly non-Muslims, over regulations such as the banning of entertainment on Thursday nights.

According to Jayum, while the move may turn off some in Kedah, it is a calculated risk as "70 percent of voters there are Malay and there are not too many non-Malay seats" to lose.

'More power hungry than hudud hungry'

Even fence-sitters, either in Kedah or elsewhere, were not likely to give the hudud issue much credence, Jayum said, as there were still a few months left for the election.

"Fence-sitters generally make their decision within weeks of the election, based on the final leg of campaigning, so right now both Pakatan and BN are working to retain their hardcore supporters," he said.

NONE For states outside the Malay belt, the issue of hudud remains a marginal matter, said political scientist James Chin (left).

"For the middle class, the issue is still corruption, and for the lower income voters, the top issue is cost of living," he said.

Chin said the Pakatan parties have also learnt their lesson since the break up of Barisan Alternatif in 1999 following the divergent stands of DAP and PAS on the Islamic state - and history is not likely to repeat itself.

The Monash University lecturer said Islamic issues have had little traction in election campaigns, having fallen flat in several recent elections.

"Other than 1999, it has been a non-issue since the 1980s. It was a flop in 2004 and in 2008; and I doubt it will work this time.

"MCA will still go around saying people will get their hands chopped, but people are saying, 'No big deal, it is the corrupt who will get their hands chopped'," Chin said.

Post-2008, he said, the political mood still revolved around a regime change, and the stakes were too high for PAS to do anything too drastic to rock the boat, even on the hudud issue.

"Expecting PAS to say it doesn't want hudud is like expecting a free market club to support communism. To expect anything else of it, or of DAP, is unreasonable.

"But the curent PAS leadership are all looking towards the 13th general election and they are more power hungry than hudud hungry," Chin added.