

PAS not pursuing hudud in Kedah
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INTERVIEW PAS does not intend to pursue the implementation of hudud law outside the East Coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu, where more than 95 percent of the people are Muslims.

In an interview with Malaysiakini last week, Kelantan PAS deputy information chief Ahmad Baihaki Atiqullah said the country's demographics were a key factor in pursuing its ambitions.

"In states where there is overwhelming Muslim population, we should be given the chance to implement hudud law.

Ahmad Baihaki Atiqullah"But in states where the population is mixed and non-Muslims make up almost half the population, we can negotiate on this, like we do here in Kelantan.

"For example, in Kedah, we don't talk about hudud because the non-Muslim population is larger there, even though Muslims make up the majority," he said.

Baihaki explained that Kedah PAS was not pursuing the matter despite ruling the state since 2008 and other states could expect a similar policy, at least until the demographics changed.

Almost of quarter of the Kedah population is non-Muslim.

He said there were also other political considerations involved in this decision.

"We may benefit in seats with large Malay majorities, but outside of Kelantan, like in Selangor, (pursuing hudud) may backfire," said the Pasir Tumbuh assemblyperson, who is also a state deputy executive councillor.

PAS has passed laws in Terengganu and Kelantan in 2000 and 1993 respectively, which contain provisions for hudud, but they cannot be implemented without the federal constitution being amended.

Kelantan PAS expects to lose seats

On PAS' chances in the next general election, Baihaki believes that the party would lose some seats to arch rival Umno because the latter had been working hard to register new voters.

"New voters will be a determining factor... In 2008, we registered most of the new voters, but Umno is working harder this time.

"Between Umno and PAS, we have registered about 150,000 voters in the state and the difference between the two parties is very small."

NONEBaihaki said the voting trend in Kelantan has been cyclical, where PAS would suffer a slump in votes after scoring a major win the term before.

"In 1990, we won 39 state seats in Kelantan but in 1995, we lost many seats. In 1999, we won all but two seats and in 2004 we held on to power with only a two-seat majority before we won big again in 2008."

Though the next general election is expected to be a "slump year", the plus side, he said, was that for the first time the government lacked its two-thirds majority in Parliament, and so would not be able to redelinate the constituencies to its advantage.

On back foot over water woes

Nevertheless, Baihaki is confident of PAS holding on to power in Kelantan despite Umno's latest onslaught over the quality of water supply in the state.

He conceded that the complaint was valid and the state government was working hard to resolve it.

"In places such as Pasir Puteh, which is short of water, we have build a new plant, but there is only so much we can do because of financial constraints.

"No state in the country can manage its water services without financial assistance from the federal government," he lamented.

Baihaki pointed out that the federal government had granted a RM500 million loan to the state to improve its water facilities but the state government has no control over how the money is spent.

"Firstly, unlike some states that receive grants, we only receive a loan and we must pay it back.

"Secondly, the money is channelled to federal agencies for disbursement and the contractors for the water projects are all appointed by the federal government."

He said an alternative was proposed by the federal government - to transfer the water administration from the state government under Air Kelantan Sdn Bhd (AKSB) to the federal government under National Water Services Commission (Span).

"We are considering this option, but our concern is if we surrender it, we will not able to control the price of water in Kelantan, the federal government can increase it and we will be helpless."

Baihaki pointed out that the current Kelantan water tariff was one of the lowest in the country and the state government did not want to increase it until it is able to improve water services to satisfactory levels.

"The federal government boasts of 1Malaysia, but the people of Kelantan are still sidelined. They talk about defending the Malays but Kelantan, with one of the largest Malay majorities, is not given our rights, including our oil royalties," he pointed out.

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