

'Non-Muslim veep in PAS can trigger anxiety'

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S Pathmawathy

The view that PAS is ready for a non-Muslim to helm a senior position in the party can easily be manipulated to cause anxiety, its vice-president Mahfuz Omar warns, saying the political situation in Malaysia is unlike that in Egypt.

Mahfuz said this when asked about the statement of PAS research division head and Kuala Selangor MP Dzulkefly Ahmad that the Islamist party "is prepared" to offer a vice-president's post to a non-Muslim, should the need arise.

"It is his (Dzulkefly's) personal opinion... it has been never brought up before and it is not fair to be raised at this juncture as such an opinion gives room to anxiety among the Malay Muslims," he said.

Malay Muslims make up 60 percent of the population and Mahfuz told Malaysiakini in an interview that such an opinion "will raise questions on their confidence in PAS and the party's stand in maintaining the position of Malays and Islam".

The political situation in Malaysia is different, the Pokok Sena MP added, as PAS has been guided by Islam from the time it was established in 1948.

At a forum on Tuesday, Dzulkefly was asked whether PAS would be open to the idea of accepting a non-Muslim into its ranks following the footsteps of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP).

'It can backfire on PAS'

"PAS, like most of the Islamist political parties in the Middle East, has been affected by the Arab Spring," Dzulkefly had said, referring to the revolution that saw the fall of dictators in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

"The political situation in Malaysia is different from that in Egypt. The parent (Muslim Brotherhood) is different from the political party (FJP)... here, PAS is a political party," Mahfuz pointed out.

The Muslim Brotherhood, which was long-prohibited under the regime of President Hosni Mubarak, triumphed in national politics after Mubarak was ousted in the Egyptian revolution.

Since Egypt's constitution bars parties based on religion, class and regionalism, the Muslim Brotherhood established FJP as a party of the people in April last year, following which Coptic thinker Rafiq Habib was appointed as one of its vice-presidents

Dzulkefly had also said that his suggestion was too premature at this period of time and that a suggestion such as taking on a non-Muslim as a leader within PAS could only be raised at the party's annual muktamar.

"The fundamental principle is that there are some things in Islam that are definite and some that are not.

"This matter is not, for it is a matter of governance. We cannot say it will never happen because Islam can address changes for intellectual renewal. Islam can withstand the challenges of time and realities," Dzulkefly had said.

However, Mahfuz said, such notions were often misconstrued in local politics and that these could backfire on the party, even though PAS has moved from its position of Malaysia being an Islamic state to that of a welfare state.

"It can be twisted into something that interferes with the faith people have in us," Mahfuz added.

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