

Hudud: A PAS objective, not an agreed Pakatan agenda

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Like any reader of the Sin Chew Daily, I was stunned by its front page headline on Aug 28, which reads: "PAS will implement hudud when it rules".

My split-second reaction was: "Gosh, this is serious!". Flashing instantly across the mind is the image of an Islamic state, mixed with the consternation that PAS might have suddenly changed course over the Islamic state issue and the devastating electoral repercussion that can be expected to ensue from the Chinese community following such a shocking turn of event.

Anxious to know more, I read through the entire two pages covering the event without pause, and was relieved that, as I expected, PAS has indeed held on to its policy of putting the pursuit of an Islamic state and implementation of hudud as a long term objective - certainly not the current priority.

I am happy that the alliance of PAS-PKR-DAP remains intact and on-course in its relentless march to Putrajaya.

Meanwhile Sin Chew's headline on Aug 28 has kicked up a mini-storm in the Internet.

Mat Sabu denies, but Sin Chew persists

PAS deputy president Mat Sabu immediately denied that he said PAS would amend the federal constitution to implement hudud should it come to power.

"I did not say (we'll bring) hudud (to Parliament)," he told Malaysiakini.

He added that good governance and social justice must be practised in Malaysia before implementing the Islamic penal code.

However, Sin Chew on the other hand also defended its headline report by giving the following sequence of events through its website on Aug 28 (Tuesday):

Stage 1: On Sunday, Aug 26:

Sin Chew asked Mat Sabu to comment on PAS president Hadi Awang's statement on Saturday (Aug 25) that PAS would implement hudud through the democratic process.

Mat Sabu answered: "Democracy is to govern through the ballot box, and change to any policy must be done through Parliament, and two-thirds support (in Parliament) is needed to amend the constitution."

Based on the above Mat Sabu answer, Sin Chew's evening edition said in its headline story: "Mat Sabu says PAS has decided to propose constitutional amendment to implement hudud should the Islamic party capture Putrajaya"

Stage 2: (Monday, Aug 28)

Upon learning from an English daily that Mat Sabu had denied saying so, Sin Chew called Mat Sabu to clarify further.

Mat Sabu reiterated that if any party wanted to amend "any Act", it would need to go through Parliament, and that he didn't mention hudud.

He also stated that the party had not discussed whether to table a motion to amend the constitution.

However, the Sin Chew reporter pressed further and asked: "The 'any Act', does it include hudud?". Mat Sabu answered: "Yes."

The reporter further asked: "Can I say PAS 'memang berhasrat' (intends) to amend the constitution to implement any Act, including hudud, but at the moment has not discussed the matter of tabling a motion in Parliament?". Mat Sabu answered: "Can."

Stage 3: (Tuesday, Aug 28)

Sin Chew splashed the headline "PAS will implement hudud when it rules", saying in its first line: "PAS deputy president Mat Sabu says PAS intends to seek constitutional amendment in Parliament in order to implement hudud, when it rules in the central government".

The truth

From the above sequence of events, we can see that Mat Sabu was telling the truth when he denied he said PAS would amend the constitution to implement hudud.

The word 'hudud' was planted into the conversation by the reporter, who was smart enough to put the questions in such a way that Mat Sabu could hardly answer in the negative.

In fact, Mat Sabu was only making a general remark when he answered that a constitutional amendment needs to have two-thirds support in Parliament.

He was certainly not specifically referring to hudud, so it is not fair to coin the words in such a way as to portray Mat Sabu as driving the point that PAS will seek parliamentary approval for implementing hudud upon taking over the federal government.

It is apparent that Mat Sabu didn't want to give a direct answer. The reasons are simple.

In the first place, a parliamentary motion from PAS needs to go through the process of building consensus within Pakatan Rakyat, more so when it is a constitutional

amendment as momentous as the introduction of hudud and the conversion of the status quo into an Islamic state. There is no such consensus now or in the foreseeable future.

Secondly, social conditions are not ripe for implementation of hudud as exemplified by the lack of social justice and good governance in our country, as pointed out by Mat Sabu and other Islamic scholars.

Thirdly, it is suicidal for PAS to hammer home the hudud agenda at this sensitive election time when it says it is still in the process of building greater understanding among non-supporters of hudud, who in all likelihood, predominate the electorate.

So, with all these hurdles standing in the way, does it make sense for PAS to trumpet the message that upon reaching Putrajaya, it will implement hudud - as if this is currently its urgent priority?

Headline misleading

Perhaps what causes the furore most is not so much the details in Sin Chew's report as the grossly misleading and sensational title of "PAS will implement hudud when it rules". It distinctly gives the impression that hudud is on the cards, the moment PAS steps into Putrajaya.

So, who among the non-Muslims wouldn't be alarmed and shocked by such a headline and the leading sentences of the story, when they have all along been assured that PAS will only move through consensus within Pakatan Rakyat and that the latter's prime political objective is to improve the people's welfare by replacing the corrupt and obsolete Barisan Nasional?

Considering that many readers do not read through all the relevant details or possess the analytical mind to sort out the wheat from the chaff, many must have already been misled and alienated by this sensational report.

(In all fairness to Sin Chew, despite the misleading headlines and the leading story on Aug 28, its entire coverage of the subject, particularly its exhaustive coverage spreading over five pages on the following day, Aug 29, do contain sufficient truthful information for the more discerning reader to form the correct conclusion).

Now that the damage has been done, it falls upon Pakatan Rakyat and democracy activists to dispel the misperception and spread the truth that hudud remains a PAS objective, but not an agreed Pakatan Rakyat agenda when it comes to power. And hence, a vote for PAS is not a vote for hudud, but a vote for good governance.