

Mat Sabu: PAS chiefs must stop bandying Islam

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PAS should not be "bandying" their Islamist credentials as the party may find itself irrelevant to Malaysians one day, said its deputy president Mohamad Sabu.

Rather, the party should return to principles of social justice taking the example from their non-Muslim counterparts, for the day will come when a "Jokowi" will be elected into office, he said.

Speaking to Malaysiakini yesterday, the PAS central committee member said that for now, the Islamists think they have complete control of the party to the extent that the syura council claims to be the highest body in the party.

"They must be with the people. Look at the DAP leaders; they refused to leave the police station compound until all the Voluntary Patrol Team (PPS) members were released," said the leader popularly known as Mat Sabu.

He was referring to the recent incident in Penang when PPS members were arrested by the police and DAP leaders stood up for them.

He said that PAS ulama, instead of merely talking Islamic rhetoric all the time, should be on the ground with the people.

"The PAS Islamists should be wary of using Islam alone to get the votes of the people, for there will come a time when a "Jokowi" will be voted in by Malaysians and PAS hardline Islamists would have to mellow (down) and give their support to the one who will be getting the popular vote.

"That popular vote - when that time comes - might go to a 'Jokowi-like' (person).

"PAS tops should not be too proud of using Islam to defend themselves for all their actions," he cautioned.

Religious credentials not key

Mat Sabu explained that Indonesians voted in its new president Joko Widodo, nicknamed Jokowi, based on his personality and what he has done for the people as the Jakarta governor, and not because of his party or religious convictions.

"Jokowi (left) is not from the ruling elite, not from the army, and is a hard rock metal fan.

"His opponent Prabowo Subianto tried to use smear campaigns to run down his religiosity

and said he was not Muslim enough, but that backfired.

"When I was in Indonesia during the announcement of results for the presidential elections, it was not rich businessmen who were Jokowi's supporters, but the common people and young men with guitars slung on their shoulders," said Mat Sabu.

Jokowi rose from the poor masses of Indonesia while his opponent Prabowo comes from an army elite background.

"Now, Jokowi is backed by the moderate Islamists and he got the highest votes to be the president," said Mat Sabu, who believed that Malaysians will one day vote not for the party but for individual candidates.

He said PAS Islamists who avoid questions of good governance and the people's welfare must realise that Malaysia has always followed the footsteps of neighbouring Indonesia.

"We gained independence right after them, we had the racial riots after they had their riots, we had the reformasi after their (reformasi following the) army takeover, we had the rise of Islamists after them, and now they have a Jokowi for their president.

"We may have a Jokowi soon and (when that time comes) those who use religion for their personal gain but ignore the people will be pushed aside," said Mat Sabu.

'Less religion, more justice'

PAS is currently divided between the ulama and progressives factions.

The former, backed by PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang (left, in green), has recently claimed they can overrule the decisions made by the PAS central committee in the Selangor menteri besar candidate.

The ulama faction and Hadi were taken to task by the progressives for submitting its own list to the palace when the rest of the opposition coalition had agreed to PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ibrahim as the MB to replace incumbent Abdul Khalid Ibrahim.

The conservatives defended their actions, stating that members should not override the ulama. PAS has always had a culture of not defying the ulama.

Mat Sabu admitted he had once mooted for PAS to follow the ulama-led style of Islamic parties such as practised in Iran, because "the Iranian ulama proved themselves to be intellectuals and with the people".

He cited Iranian president Hassan Rouhani who, apart from his ulama credentials, has been hailed internationally as a political moderate and reformist leader due to his academic and diplomatic background.

"The ulamas of PAS must reform themselves and be more open with regard to issues of corruption and justice," said Mat Sabu.

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