Will Najib block the hudud bill?
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The hudud bill was one of the burning issues raised during the meeting between Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and BN component party leaders in Parliament yesterday.

The leaders had reached a consensus that hudud was against the federal constitution.

"Najib also acknowledged this consensus that hudud would be against the federal constitution," a BN component party leader told Malaysiakini on condition of anonymity.

However, a mere consensus leaves much room for interpretation as seen in Pakatan Rakyat's agreement which fell apart after PAS unilaterally bulldozed the theocratic law.

Even the BN leader did not wish to interpret any further than what was said, stressing that the BN component parties had already made it clear that the current civil criminal code is sufficient.

However, another BN component party leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity, saw this as an assurance that Najib would not allow hudud to see the light of day in Parliament.

They said the prime minister also agreed to issue a statement soon, which would reveal his stand.

Balancing act for Najib

Najib, who is also BN chairperson, must not only juggle his coalition partners but also Umno which has taken a stance opposite of what the BN components want.

For example, Umno supreme council Ismail Sabri (right) today told BN component parties to butt out, and defended the 12 Umno state assemblypersons who had voted in favour of amendments to the Kelantan Syariah Criminal Code (II) 1993 which forms the basis of hudud.

PAS has already initiated what it believes is the final hurdle to implement hudud by submitting a notice to table a private member's bill in Parliament this session.

The bill seeks to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965, which currently limits punishments imposed by the syariah court to no more than three years imprisonment, a fine of up to RM5,000 and six strokes of the rotan for certain offences.

Removing the limits would allow the syariah court to mete out punishments according to Kelantan's hudud legislation, which among others, includes stoning to death and up to 80 lashings.

If Najib were to cave in to BN component leaders, he could simply do nothing as a private members' bill is normally queued behind a long list of government bills and do not surface.

But if he were to bow to Umno's demands, then the amendment would eventually come up for a vote in Parliament, whether in this session or the next.

This would likely put both coalitions in an awkward situation and strain ties between the Muslim and non-Muslim parties.

Alternatively, Najib could still let Umno have its way for a vote and wait out the legal action initiated by Gerakan and MCA to challenge the constitutionality of hudud.

A downright rejection of hudud is not an option for Najib as Umno might come across as turning its back on a Muslim obligation and lose support among Muslim voters to PAS.

Ultimately, it would be a balancing act for Najib but he is more likely to take Umno's sentiments into account as it is the party that ensures he remains prime minister.

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