

PAS rules out Islamic crackdown in Kedah
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Islamic party PAS moved today to dispel fears it will impose its values on states won by the opposition in weekend elections, amid reports that alcohol and short skirts are already out of favour. MCPX

The Star newspaper said hotels and entertainment outlets in Kedah, one of four states claimed by opposition parties in stunning electoral gains, were already making changes.

"Beer will still be sold. We just don't want to make it obvious," said an executive at one hotel where alcohol was shifted to a more discreet location.

"We do not think skirts will be suitable any more," said an official at another hotel which is reviewing its employees' dress code.

Other establishments told the daily they were concerned the austere values of PAS, which has ruled another northern state, Kelantan, for 18 years, would mean the end of lavish government functions.

But PAS secretary-general Kamaruddin Jaafar said changing lifestyles was not the party's top priority as it works to form coalitions with opposition parties to rule the newly acquired states.

To repay non-Muslim support

Kedah, neighbouring Perak, the island state of Penang, and Selangor which surrounds Kuala Lumpur, will be governed by various combinations of PAS, Anwar Ibrahim's PKR and the predominantly Chinese DAP.

kamaruddin jaafarKamaruddin said PAS would be sensitive to the feelings of minority ethnic Chinese and Indians who led the electoral rush away from the ruling coalition, which is dominated by Muslim Malays.

"We appreciate the fact that we obtained this massive victory this time through all Malaysians in Kedah, the Malays and the non-Malays," he told AFP.

"We are not going to let down any racial groups," he said. "We want to repay their support with policies that benefit all."

"We will ... not impose overnight on the people, especially on matters like their lifestyles."

Nearly two decades ago when PAS took control of Kelantan, it swiftly closed down nightclubs, pool halls and cinemas, and severely restricted the sale of alcohol.

Welfare state, not Islamic state

PAS also took control of Terengganu state in 1999 elections and, emboldened by the win, pushed its agenda for an Islamic state more aggressively, but was soundly rejected in 2004

polls when it lost the state.

Chastened by the experience, it has since adopted a more moderate stance, reaching out to minorities and dropping all talk of an Islamic state that would punish wrongdoers with stonings and amputation.

PAS has said that laws still in force in conservative Kelantan, where men and women are even required to queue separately at supermarkets, may not be appropriate for other states.

But even in Kelantan, most ethnic Chinese and Indians say they are allowed to practice their own cultural traditions and religions freely, and have few problems with life under the party.

Saturday's elections saw the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition deprived of its two-thirds majority in the national parliament for the first time in four decades, as well as suffering the unprecedented loss of four states.

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