

PM, DPM to remain Muslim, PAS assures Malay electorate
The Malaysian Insider
September 11, 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 11 — PAS has moved to assure its grassroots that the country's top two leaders will still be Muslim if Pakatan Rakyat (PR) takes over the country.

The issue was raised at the Islamist party's national meeting here yesterday as its political rival Umno has touched on the viability and captancy of the PAS-DAP-PCR opposition pact.

"I can guarantee you the prime minister will be a Muslim, and hopefully the deputy prime minister will also be a Muslim," party secretary-general Datuk Mustafa Ali told PAS delegates attending the day-long briefing of its "Negara Berkebajikan" concept to be rolled out as part of the party manifesto for the 13th general elections widely expected to be called by end of this year.

"Imam, Insya Allah, selamat [the imam, Insya Allah, is safe]," he added.

The delegates had earlier pressed the PAS central leadership for answers to the question, with one unknown man asking: "Dalam PR, siapa imam? Macam di BN [the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition] imamnya ialah dari Umno... Kalau tak tentu imam, plan B pula macam mana? [Who will be imam in PR? In BN, the imam is from Umno... if the imam has yet to be determined, how will plan B work?]"

In the party's lingo, "imam" was used as a parallel to represent the prime minister, while "plan B" appeared to refer to PAS' proposed alternative welfare system, which the delegates also wanted to know was a replacement for its "Islamic statehood" plan.

Mustafa (picture) told the delegates that its "Negara Berkebajikan" concept had been discussed and was accepted by allies PCR and DAP at their last retreat two months ago.

However, he said the issue of who will hold which post in the PR alternative government was not discussed specifically.

"We didn't discuss it in detail because the person who is to be prime minister must win in the general election," he explained, saying the pact would be in trouble if the PM candidate lost.

But he added that all in PR were conscious that the dominant Malay electorate must be reflected in its top leadership choices.

While the Federal Constitution states that a Malay must be Muslim, it is silent on the ethnic and religious background of the person picked to be prime minister, and left it wholly to the discretion of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.

Fears of a non-Muslim prime minister had first surfaced in May this year following a front-paged news report by Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia titled "Kristian agama rasmi? [Christianity the official religion?]"

The Malay daily had claimed there was a secret plot between the DAP and several pastors to

put a Christian in place of a Muslim as PM, which the majority ethnic Chinese party has denied.

DAP leaders have also acknowledged that the current political situation favoured the majority Malays to lead any government. The party has also foregone the opposition leader's despite have the most seats among its partners in PR.

There are some 12 million registered voters for the next general elections which must be held by 2013 when the ruling Barisan Nasional's (BN) mandate expires for the federal government. PR holds four states and 76 federal seats.

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/pm-dpm-to-remain-muslim-p-as-assures-malay-electorate/>