

In Kelantan, hudud to be bellwether for Malay votes
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KOTA BARU, Nov 4 — PAS's success or failure in implementing hudud in Kelantan will serve as an indicator of Malay voter support there ahead of a general election expected to be called soon, politicians here say.

The Islamist party has repeatedly blamed the federal government for the failure to enforce the law, enacted in Kelantan back in 1993, when it first received objection from then-Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir had previously written to Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat in 1993 to inform him that the state did not have the right to introduce hudud, which prescribes stoning, whipping and amputation as punishment for criminal offences.

But the state government recently announced the formation of a hudud technical committee, reaffirming its commitment to see that the legislation is eventually enforced in Kelantan.

State government leaders have said the newly-formed committee would study the possibility of the law being enacted without having to amend the Federal Constitution or existing syariah laws.

"The time for talk is over. It is now time for action, time to see it through," Nik Aziz told reporters last week after attending a public function on the outskirts of Lubok Setol near Rantau Panjang.

The Kelantan MB said hudud would be able to address a multitude of issues affecting Muslims including the issue of apostasy.

But the Kelantan Umno leadership has come out and attacked the state government for its "rushed" plans to enact such laws, claiming that it was a last-ditch attempt in garnering support among the Malay electorate, who make up 95 per cent of the population in the state.

"They are now resorting to the hudud committee because they know Malays in Kelantan are angry about hudud. PAS wants to implement it before the next elections to soothe Malays, to keep to a promise they have made years ago," said Umno leader Datuk Che Alwi Ahmad (picture).

The state opposition leader said PAS had painted a wrong picture about hudud to non-Muslims by highlighting only the punishments and not about the fairness of the system.

"Hudud is about fairness to the victim, it is not just about punishment; it has already been enforced in Malaysia partially over the years with punishments like caning and death, it's just that the extreme ones like amputation is not there.

"I support hudud. Umno supports hudud. We'd be crazy not to, as Muslims, it's just that it

can only be implemented when everyone here understands about it," he told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview recently.

But PAS state leaders have brushed aside the allegations that the hudud issue was aimed at gaining Malay support, and maintained that it has always been consistent in its push for Islamic law.

"PAS's struggle has always been about establishing an Islamic way of governance through policies, law. Hudud is a part of it. It is not an election ploy, that is why there is no time frame.

"The technical committee has been set up because law experts have recently found the possibility that we can bring in the laws without having to amend the constitution," state executive councillor Datuk Mohd Amar Nik Abdullah told The Malaysian Insider.

Mohd Amar, who handles the state portfolio for Islamic development and education, was appointed by the Kelantan MB to spearhead the hudud technical committee. The committee, to be chaired by Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Yakob, will include 18 other members, among whom are state syariah chief judge Datuk Daud Mohamad, Kelantan Mufti Datuk Mohamad Shukri Mohamad, State Islamic Affairs Department director Datuk Che Mohd Rahim Jusoh and Kelantan police chief Datuk Jalaluddin Abdul Rahman.

"The time is ripe for hudud law. Crime is at an alarming level, so many problems in society need to be dealt with. We believe that the Muslims in Kelantan will have no problem supporting this, it is a call for reinforcement of faith," said Mohd Amar.

PAS state assemblyman Abdul Fatah Haron said the state government had conducted various programmes annually to generate a better understanding of Islamic laws.

"This year we just had a 'Hari Hudud' a few months back, where we invited panellists to come and discuss issues pertaining to the law.

"Umno is saying we are using this for votes because they have nothing to attack us with. Kelantan may not be rich, but we are spiritual, we have our faith," the Bukit Tunku state lawmaker told The Malaysian Insider.

The upcoming elections are expected to be a close fight between PAS and Umno, where the state opposition has already begun a vigorous campaign in different constituencies in Kelantan, promising progress and development if elected to power. Umno has not been in government in Kelantan since 1990.

Umno captured only six of the 45 state seats in Kelantan in the last general election. But the party retook the Galas state seat in a 2010 by-election that saw an 82 per cent voter turnout which analysts say was due to support from first-time voters.

State seats which Umno lost by fewer than a 1,000-vote margin include Pengkalan Kubor, Wakaf Baru, Periok, Gual, Bukit Tunku, Selising, Semerak, Gaal, Kemuning, Air Lanas and Dabong.

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