

PR slams Utusan for stoking religious conflict
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By Lisa J. Ariffin

PETALING JAYA, Aug 9 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) today slammed Malay daily Utusan Malaysia for stoking “religious conflict” after the Umno-owned paper ran a controversial report on its front page yesterday titled “Haram sokong DAP” (Forbidden to support DAP).

Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (picture) told reporters the Malay broadsheet’s reports were a political campaign by religious extremists to instil disaffection towards PR parties, pointing out that the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), including its lynchpin Umno, has previously said it was against carrying out “hudud”, the Islamic penal code that metes out harsh punishment for offenders.

He said the reports by Utusan were a “campaign by religious extremists to punish the DAP” for not supporting the enforcement of hudud.

“But MCA does not support hudud. Umno too,” said Anwar, referring to a letter penned by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the country’s fourth and longest-serving prime minister to Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat in 1994 stating the federal government’s opposition to enforcement of hudud.

The former deputy prime minister-turned-opposition leader said that sixth PM Datuk Seri Najib Razak had similarly disapproved of hudud.

Najib, who took office in April three years ago, was reported to have said last September that the federal government cannot enforce hudud because it had to consider the current realities in the multireligious country.

While Islam is recognised to be the religion of the federation, the Federal Constitution protects the rights of citizens to practise freely the religion of their choice.

“Why do the ulama say only DAP cannot be supported when Umno’s and MCA’s speeches are in the same category?” he told a news conference today.

DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang, who was also at the same news conference, branded the Utusan report as “a very irresponsible and seditious act”.

“We have to unite the people of Malaysia, but Utusan is doing otherwise. This shows how a fraction of Umno leaders are so desperate they would lose in the general election they have resorted to dangerous and dirty tactics,” Lim said.

“Do they want to create a religious conflict in Malaysia?” he asked.

Lim said the DAP accepts completely Islam’s standing in the constitution as the country’s official religion.

“Our stand is that Malaysia is secular and Islam is the official religion,” he said.

The Pahang mufti has also backed a growing campaign among Umno-aligned religious leaders, declaring it "haram" (forbidden) for Muslims to support the DAP after several Islamic scholars called the secular party "kafir harbi" or belligerent infidels, distinguishing it from the MCA or MIC as parties that have accepted the faith's supremacy in multireligious Malaysia.

Datuk Abdul Rahman Osman was reported by Utusan as saying it is "haram" and a sin for Muslims to support a party that has openly stated it is opposed to an Islamic state and the enforcement of hudud that provides for harsh penalties for crimes such as the amputation of hands for theft.

"If non-Muslims say they oppose, disagree, will not be loyal, therefore it is not an obligation to help them.

"In the context of a party, if it openly states that it is opposed to Islam, it is a sin for Muslims to support. If we support it, it is as if we are supporting a movement to oppose our own religion," the mufti was quoted as telling the Malay paper in a report published today.

Also in today's Utusan reports, Fathul Bari Mat Jahaya, from the Young Ulama secretariat, said the DAP could be harmful to Muslims.

"DAP's agenda is different from that of MCA and MIC because they (the two Barisan Nasional parties) are not 'kafir harbi' and therefore will not bring harm to Islam's status," he told Utusan.

The Malay-Muslim community is the single largest grouping in Malaysia's population.

Yesterday, an Islamic religious scholar, Abdullah Sa'amah, declared it "haram" for Muslims to support the DAP, according to a front-page report in Utusan.

But the founder of the Pondok Geting religious school in Tumpat, Kelantan said it was acceptable for Muslims to support Umno's political partners, the MCA and MIC, because they recognised Islam's pre-eminence.

Abdullah said Muslims must not vote for the DAP and its two allies PAS and PKR in the 13th general election that must be called by April next year.

The religion's right-wing faction, including within Umno, the ruling BN's main party, has made its presence more pronounced in recent years with several Umno politicians in its Johor stronghold proposing hudud be enforced in the southern state.

To date, only Kelantan and Terengganu had passed hudud as laws but have not been enforced as they run counter to the Federal Constitution.

A recent survey by independent pollster Merdeka Center has shown that Malay voters' satisfaction with BN dropped from 65 per cent in May to 58 per cent in June.

The approval ratings for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who is also BN president, among the Malay community had dipped from 79 per cent to 75 per cent in the same period.

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