

PAS will never get back non-Muslim support, says Mat Sabu
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Mohamad Sabu is one of PAS's most popular leaders, outside his party and among non-Muslims, that is. Internally, the party booted him out at the recent elections where he failed to defend the deputy president's post. In the first of a two-part interview, Mat Sabu, as he is popularly known, mourns the passing of an Islamist party that enjoyed the support of non-Muslims for a period and fears it may never regain that trust.

Even if he is voted back into the PAS leadership, the Islamist party will never regain its non-Muslim support, said former deputy president Mohamad Sabu.

Better known as Mat Sabu and popular with the non-Muslim crowd, he also told of how hard he had to work to persuade PAS grassroots members to go out and rally with non-Muslims in earlier demonstrations led by electoral reform group Bersih.

Mat Sabu painted a bleak future for the only opposition party with a religious ideology that had contributed to the death of Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

He said there was now no remedy which could fix the situation for PAS to get back its non-Muslim support.

"Non-Muslims are disappointed and broken-hearted by the whole situation.

"Furthermore, PAS is now led by personalities from the east coast who rarely come into contact with Malaysians of other races and faiths," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Mat Sabu said the east coast leaders from Kelantan and Terengganu might think they do not need non-Muslim support since they only interacted with Malays daily.

"They won't feel it like we do here in Penang and Selangor. The Kelantan leaders had even said it is okay to do without PR because they were making assessments based on their own locations.

"They can win in their areas but what about Selangor, Malacca and Johor? In Kedah, there are also parliamentary constituencies where non-Muslim votes make up some 40%."

He said the PAS leaders were not realistic if they thought the party could make it in general elections on its own.

"In an election, you must have a coalition, unless you just want to be a regional party in Kelantan and Terengganu.

"This is all going backwards."

He said when the first Bersih rally was being planned in 2007, it took him almost a year to go around asking PAS members to take part and join those from other races in the demonstration.

The success of the rally, he said, contributed to PR's victory in five states – Penang, Kedah, Perak, Selangor and Kelantan – in the 2008 general election.

"Now, that multiracial image we built is gone. I do feel sad. Let PAS with its present leadership try to gather a crowd with all the different races now.

"The ulamas in PAS organised an anti-GST (goods and services tax) rally first but the event was only attended by their own people. GST affects all Malaysians. You have got to include everyone.

"This is what we are seeing. If PAS goes back to being a regional party, it will become stronger. But when election comes, it will be another matter."

Mat Sabu said even with PR now dead, the ruling Barisan Nasional would still fall, with or without PAS in the picture, because the people, especially the younger generation, were rejecting the ruling coalition.

He said PAS should take care about trying to get close to Umno because this would only spell its own ruin.

"If PAS wants to work with Umno, it, too, will suffer a hit. People just don't want BN or Umno.

"Take the Permatang Pauh by-election last month. In all streams, the percentage of votes for PKR by youth went up. It was not because they were PKR members. They just didn't support Umno."

The PR pact "officially died" on Wednesday after PKR agreed with DAP that it no longer existed.

The end of PR came after the PAS leadership, now dominated by the conservative ulama faction led by party president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, accepted a motion to sever ties with DAP without debate.

The relationship between DAP and PAS had been rocky since last year over the Selangor menteri besar imbroglio, and worsened after the Islamist party tabled and passed the hudud bill in the Kelantan assembly to implement the Islamic penal code in the state.

Things appeared to reach the point of no return when PAS adopted a motion without

debate at its recent general assembly to cut ties with DAP. – June 19, 2015.

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