

HUDUD WON'T GIVE AMANAH EDGE OVER PAS, ANALYSTS SAY

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Amanah's Sungai Besar by-election candidate Azhar Abdul Shukur speaks to the media, June 5, 2016. — Picture by Choo Choy May

Amanah's Sungai Besar by-election candidate Azhar Abdul Shukur speaks to the media, June 5,



KUALA LUMPUR, June 7 — Controversy over PAS's so-called hudud Bill will not be an advantage to rival Amanah in the Sungai Besar by-election, political observers have concluded.

While the appearance of PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang's Bill in Parliament has unsettled non-Muslim voters, Amanah's shared Islamist roots meant it was not poised to take advantage of support for or rejection towards hudud.

Hudud remains an unresolved issue within the Pakatan Harapan pact, even when the preceding Pakatan Rakyat collapsed due to disagreement over the Islamic penal code. DAP is patently against its introduction, while Amanah said it wished to see hudud become reality in Malaysia, but not without the agreement of its partners.

But after Umno's wily move to ensure Hadi's hudud Bill arrived in Parliament ahead of the June 18 by-election, Amanah may have to present a firm position on hudud, one that will unlikely appease both Muslim supporters and its non-Muslim allies.

"What are they (Amanah) going to tell their voters? Are they going to declare that they are not supporting hudud? It is going to be tough on them to explain this," Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Associate Professor Dr Jeniri Amir said.

Amanah last week announced its Sungai Besar chairman, Azhar Ab Shukur, as the candidate for the by-election, quashing previous speculation that party president Mohamad Sabu would be fielded.

Azhar will face PAS's Meru assemblyman Dr Abdul Rani Osman and Barisan Nasional's Budiman Mohd Zohdi, who is also the representative for the Sungai Panjang state seat.

The topic of hudud was not broached during Azhar's announcement by Pakatan Harapan, but it will not be long before the local leader must confront the issue head on.

"Now they are on their own and it is not clear if Amanah is against hudud. So who is going to win in the by-elections? I don't know. But the Chinese and Indian voters will definitely not vote for PAS and Umno," independent political analyst Khoo Kay Peng told *Malay Mail Online*.

But analysts believed that PAS was also unlikely to gain significantly from the hudud Bill.

After Umno scored the desired political mileage by elevating Hadi's Bill in Parliament, the PAS president unexpectedly deferred its tabling to October, prompting questions about his party's sincerity in pursuing the matter.

Jeniri concluded that the entire episode meant Umno and Barisan Nasional were now best poised to appeal to voters in the federal constituency, as did Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia associate professor Dr Faizal Hazis.

"Voters would vote for PAS, but because the party is no longer a strong party after falling out with DAP and PKR, the people will most likely elect the BN candidate because BN is in power and governs the Malaysian government," Faizal told *Malay Mail Online*.

Hadi's private member's Bill seeks to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 to empower Islamic courts to enforce punishments — except for the death penalty — provided in Shariah laws for Islamic offences listed under state jurisdiction in the Federal Constitution, without elaborating on the nature of the punishments.

He had repeatedly failed to table the Bill until the intervention of Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, which other political researchers concluded was a political gambit for the concurrent Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar by-elections.

Sungai Besar is a primarily rural federal constituency with 42,836 registered voters, 67.18 per cent of whom are Malay, 30.18 per cent Chinese, and 1.91 per cent Indian..

The late Datuk Noriah Kasnon, whose death triggered the by-election, won the seat by just 399 votes in Election 2013.