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Special Report: Umno-Kelantan

UMNO'S MOVE TO CAPTURE KELANTAN IS NO PIPE DREAM

By: Ali Mamat

KOTA BAHARU: Five nights ago, head of the Umno Kelantan liaison Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah was invited to give a talk in PAS strongest stronghold in the state, that is, Pengkalan Chepa.

Tengku Razaleigh invited this writer along. His intention was clear, that is, to show that his claims that Umno has the support of the Kelantanese people were real and not a mirage.

It must be said that anyone looking at Kelantan from afar would find it hard to believe that Tengku Razaleigh who was appointed the state Umno chief barely four months ago could create much impact in the state politics so as to enable the Barisan Nasional to wrest control of Kelantan from PAS in the Nov 29 general election.

Nevertheless, the rousing welcome given to Tengku Razaleigh at Pengkalan Chepa can be an early reminder to PAS in general and Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat in particular, that they should not be too arrogant as to think that they are invincible in the north-eastern state.

State political observers say they had not to see an Umno public rally so well received by the people (except those given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) since Umno was defeated by PAS in 1990 until Tengku Razaleigh came back into the party fold.

"Judging from the overwhelming support given to Tengku Razaleigh even in Pengkalan Chepa, it would not be surprising for Umno to create an upset in this election," said a Pulau Pinang journalist who had served in Kelantan when BN managed to topple PAS for the first time in the state in 1978. PAS was then in control of the state since 1959.

Pengkalan Chepa is the only parliamentary seat retained by PAS in 1978. The state seat Chempaka, held by Nik Aziz before the dissolution of the Parliament and state assembly on Nov 11, is within the Pengkalan Chepa constituency.

#### LARGE CROWD

What was interesting about the Tengku Razaleigh talk that night was that a large number of the audience were the local residents or voters, giving credence to Tengku Razaleigh's earlier claim that Umno Kelantan need not "import" outsiders to its ceremahs, unlike PAS.

"Even if there are 200 people attending our ceramahs, they are genuine supporters who can be used to gauge the real support of the people for Umno," he said.

The former president of the defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) which had teamed up with PAS against the BN in the 1990 and 1995 elections said, PAS strength in the state has been eroded by its inconsistent policies, quarrels between its leadership, confusion in its understanding with its partners in the Alternative Front, that is, KeAdilan, DAP dan PRM, and infighting for seats among the party leaders.

He said the failure of PAS to develop the state, said to be the most backward in the country, and its inability to fulfill its election pledges after 10 years of rule, also affected PAS influence in the state.

#### Rakyat Aware of PAS Failure

The rakyat, he said, are now aware that PAS is prepared to do whatever, even to the extent of sacrificing its own principles or original political

struggle, just to cling to power.

"Before PAS say Umno are 'kafirs' (non-believers) because we work together with MCA and MIC. Now, PAS partner the DAP. Before, they said (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim will be appointed prime minister if the Alternative Front wins, then they quietly say (PAS president) Fadzil Noor should be the PM and lately, they say they are prepared to accept a non-Muslim to be the PM when in the past they said a non-believer (kafir) cannot be a leader.

"This is the real character of PAS leaders ... never consistent in its cause ... never fulfill its promises. All these make the rakyat of Kelantan fed up and leave the party to join us," said Tengku Razaleigh.

KeAdilan Played Out?

He claimed that like his S46 party, KeAdilan would be played out by PAS, including seats allocations, at least, in Kelantan.

He said from his information, KeAdilan is given only one parliamentary seat and two or three state seats in Kelantan in the coming polls.

At the same time, the tussle for seats among the PAS leaders has weakened the party machinery in the state. At least two MPs, that is, Haji Mohamad Sabu (Kubang Kerian) and Daeng Sanusi Mariok (Rantau Panjang), would be dropped in this election.

Tengku Razaleigh also believed that the return of Umno's influence and strength in the state is aided by the unity of its leaders at the branch, division and state level.

Many previous analyses found that the BN had lost in the 1990 and 1995 elections not because PAS were too strong but more because Umno itself were weakened by the different self-serving factions within the party.

This time around, Umno Kelantan is also strengthened by the return of tens of thousands of Tengku Razaleigh's followers and supporters when S46 was dissolved in 1996.

According to Tengku Razaleigh, the question of Umno accepting the former S46 members did not arise anymore because apart from being absorbed into the existing Umno branches, the party supreme council has given them the greenlight to set up branches in their respective areas.

Former Kelantan S46 liaison chief, Datuk Haji Rozali Isohak, said he believed that the former S46 members could be the factor to tilt the votes in favour of Umno candidates in this election, because in the 1995 election almost all the PAS candidates won with slim majorities, around a few hundreds of votes.

Before parliament was dissolved, PAS had 26 out of the 43 state seats and six of the 14 parliamentary constituencies in Kelantan.

New Dents in PAS

Tengku Razaleigh said he saw the birth of another PAS splinter party, that is, PAS Baru, as a factor that could dent the strength of PAS in the coming polls though it would not benefit Umno much.

He said PAS move to isolate parti Berjasa which were cooperating with PAS in the 1990 and 1995 elections could also result in a reduction of votes for PAS in the Nov 29 election.

In spite of all these, Tengku Razaleigh cautioned the Umno Kelantan leaders not to be arrogant like some PAS leaders. He admitted that he does not have an "Aladdin Lamp" to do wonders in the state, to the extent of making the BN win back Kelantan easily.

He said in spite of the factors favouring Umno, the road to victory is fraught with challenges and thorns.

"All I can say is that I am happy with the obvious changes among the Kelantanese people to support Umno, compared to the scenario before I was

appointed head of the state liaison committee.

"My only hope is that the people of Kelantan do not continue to make a wrong choice, especially when we are moving into a new millennium that is filled with challenges, competition, trial and tribulation.

"PAS, as proven, do not have the capability to lead the people to meet these challenges," said Tengku Razaleigh. -- Bernama

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