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Disunited and tired Kelantan Umno will fail

KELANTAN is a majority Malay State where Pas is entrenched - more because of the State Umno's inability to pull together effectively than the loyalty of its voters to the purportedly Islamic party. That Umno's problems there are not yet over is manifest in the brewing disaffection against the party's local leadership.

Charges of ineffectiveness levelled at these leaders by 12 of the 14 heads of division suggest how much remains to be done to restore the party to fighting fitness in the State.

Under the present circumstances, therefore, it will be difficult for Umno to take on Pas. Its problem in Kelantan is one of unity, which urgently needs resolving if it is to stand any chance of winning the State.

Even when it was at its most cohesive, when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself was liaison chief, Umno found the going tough. Naturally, without unity a new leadership will make little difference. Umno in the east coast States of the peninsula cannot afford to have weekend politicians at the helm.

They must live in Kelantan and go on the ground, working around the clock to chip away at the sinews of 12 years of opposition rule.

The perception that Umno has lost credibility among the Malays because of persistent election setbacks in Kelantan is not backed up by reality. Three-quarters of the Malay population of the country live outside of Kelantan and voted for Umno, granting the party dominant representation in Parliament and most of the State Assemblies. Umno can recapture Kota Baru, but only if it prevents its internal divisions in the State from turning into a permanent disability. Perhaps new leadership would also be required at divisional level from where the State party's entire machinery can then be overhauled.

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