

Tok Pa gives his all to win back Kelantan

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JOURNALISTS who met up with Datuk Mustapa Mohamad at his house in Kuala Lumpur recently were taken aback when the man excused himself so that he could make tea for everyone.

Embarrassed by Mustapa's gesture, the journalists insisted that the Kelantan Umno chief not trouble himself but the mild-mannered politician, affectionately known as Tok Pa, brushed aside their protests.

"It is normal for me to serve my guests," said the former Second Finance Minister.

His humility and uneasiness with protocol is well known especially in Kelantan in the past four years since the humiliating defeat of Barisan Nasional. Mustapa was also a casualty in the 1999 polls when he lost the Jeli seat that he won in 1995.

Even Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat was shocked when told by journalists then that Tok Pa had lost the seat to PAS' candidate Mohd Apandi Mohamad by 693 votes.

Since then, Mustapa has kept a blistering pace in Kelantan - often starting at dawn - when he goes from meet-the-people sessions to checking the Umno election machinery.

He covers more than three districts with at least eight official and unofficial functions at least five times a week.

"As soon as he touches down in Kota Baru, he has to cover up to five functions, covering three to four constituencies."

"When he was a minister, he used to spend four days in Kuala Lumpur and the rest in Kota Baru but, lately, it has been at least six days in Kota Baru and only one day in Kuala Lumpur," revealed Juhaidi Yean Abdullah,

Kelantan Umno chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamad has been working hard since 1999 to win back the state for Barisan Nasional. SYED AZHAR looks at Tok Pa's humble style and down to earth approach that has caused even the ever-confident PAS to take notice.

one of Mustapa's aides.

Juhaidi, who has been working for Mustapa for three years, said his boss was often away from his family because of his commitment to winning back Kelantan.

"He seldom sees his children. But his wife (Datin Kamarzan Ahmad Meah) is very supportive and even attends functions in Kelantan and this is probably the most time my boss gets to be with his wife," quipped Juhaidi.

It is surprising to many to learn that this soft-spoken politician has a first-class honours degree in Economics from Melbourne University and Masters in Development Economic from Boston University.

Mustapa's simple ways and humble style belie his qualifications.

Mustapa, during that tea session, admitted that things were not going to be easy for Umno in Kelantan.

In 1999, PAS swept 41 of the 43 state seats and won all but one of the 12 parliamentary seats - only Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah managed to hold on to Gua Musang.

But the recent appointment of new four pro-tem division chiefs have complicated matters for Mustapa who until recently enjoyed all round support from the party members in the state.

To make matters worse, PAS' strength in the state and the popularity of Nik Aziz have also

not waned.

These new hurdles only make Mustapa's job even more difficult.

This mild-mannered man, whose parents were religious teachers in his Bachok hometown, is well known to be "very responsible" when it comes to money and this has created problems when dealing with some party members who are "money-minded."

"Tok Pa is very responsible when it comes to money. He wants to know where every sen goes. Not all Umno members can accept this.

"Tok Pa used to thank us for our articles and say that God would repay us for our deeds. This is fine for us journalists but Umno members who will be working for the party this general election may expect something more material," said a Malay newspaper journalist.

Mustapa will contest at Jeli again in the upcoming general election and is widely expected to regain the seat.

"Umno can expect to do better this time round if they can overcome the latest rift.

"But come what may, Mustapa will soldier on in his ambition to regain Kelantan from PAS even if he has to do it single-handedly," said a party member.

Besides, he recently declared that Kelantan Umno intends to win the state as a parting gift for former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.