

Nik Aziz has set high standards for politicians

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COMMENT Many Kelantanese only know Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat as a menteri besar and his departure on Monday as head of the state government, after 22 years, may have caught many by surprise. However, it has been an expected move on his part.

The frail-looking Nik Aziz has been in and out of hospital of late, but his contest in the state seat of Chempaka, which he successfully defended with an increased majority of 6,500 votes, stems from his pacifying the Kelantanese that he will remain in power. His statements before the election reflect this.

NONENik Aziz himself, and many PAS leaders as well, know that if he were to step down before the general election, PAS may have a problem retaining the state, for the Kelantanese would stay with PAS because the party represented their spiritual leader.

Now, with his former deputy Ahmad Yaakob taking over as menteri besar, the people have time to evaluate Ahmad's capability, and to decide whether PAS should be allowed to continue leading the state after the next general election, which will not be due until 2018.

The people of Kelantan hold Nik Aziz dearly. A very simple man, in person and in the way he lived. When he first became menteri besar, he chose not to stay in the official residence of the state government head but in own kampung house in Pulau Melaka, where he continued to lead his humble life.

It is said that even when Nik Aziz performed his prayers in his office, he would switch off the lights, for he considered this as his private time with God and that there was no need to use the rakyat's money.

Immortalised words

One of Nik Aziz's famous quotes, which is immortalised and much liked in Facebook, is "Teruskan perjuangan saya selepas saya tiada... usia ambo kini 81 tahun, roh yang pergi pada malamnya jika tidak kembali matilah ambo. Buatlah segala yang upaya untuk memenangkan Islam di muka bumi ini sebelum bertemu Allah."

In English: "Continue on with my struggle... I am already 81 years old, and if my

spirit leaves at night (when asleep) and does not return, I will be dead. Do all you can to make sure Islam wins in this land before I meet Allah."

Certainly, Nik Aziz has seen the highs and lows since taking charge of Kelantan in 1990, when PAS battled the general election that years in team with then Umno breakaway Parti Semangat 46.

His statements have often enough been manipulated by the mainstream media. He has seen the Kelantan government being shunned by the federal government and even denied the federal funds provided to all states - the action of former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad who remains critical of Nik Aziz to this day.

Till today, whatever federal funds are used in Kelantan are spent through the various federal agencies in the state and not given directly to the Kelantan government.

Nik Aziz was also pivotal in backing PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim to lead Pakatan Rakyat's thrust in the 13th general election. This came despite the criticisms against Anwar when he was deputy prime minister and his opposition to the Kelantan government in the 1990s, when he was with Umno.

NONEThe PAS spiritual leader was even patient with the federal government's denial of the oil royalty to Kelantan since 2004, though the people were angered by Petronas staff boarding boats from Terengganu to go to the offshore oil platform in Kelantan waters, rather than taking off from Bachok.

This move was to hide from the people of Kelantan that the national oil company is tapping oil out of their territory, but it only made Petronas look stupid.

And, despite former Petronas founder and Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a Kelantan prince, supporting the state's claim to oil royalty, the federal government continued to reject all pleas and demands on the matter, which till today remains a dispute before the court.

A tough act to follow

Hence, Nik Aziz and the people of Kelantan have seen it all, through thick and thin, as to what the federal government thinks of them and how it continues to treat them.

Certainly, having governed Kelantan for more than 22 years and being the only opposition state government since the 1990s, Nik Aziz's rule, political philosophy

and humble life will be a tough act to follow.

The opposition had a chance to rule Terengganu, but for only one term, from 1999 to 2004. Since then, Penang, Kedah, Perak and Selangor moved into opposition hands in 2008, but Perak only for a short while, which defections caused the Pakatan government to collapse in February 2009.

Despite being an Islamic scholar, the respect and aura around Nik Aziz transcends racial boundaries. The man is open to all, and shows his respect for other religions as well.

Nik Aziz Nik Mat and Penang bishop Sebastian Francis He enjoys a good relationship with DAP leader Karpal Singh, despite the lawyer's tough stance on hudud and the Islamic state. Nik Aziz also warmly received a visit from head of the Penang Diocese, Bishop Sebastian Francis.

During the ceramah sessions held by the various Pakatan parties nationwide, people regardless of race would come in droves just to see, listen and to meet with Nik Aziz.

Nik Aziz's withdrawal from active politics has been as quiet as the way he stepped into the hot seat in Kelantan in 1990.

Since Sunday's election, he has been spending his time in hospital, recuperating from the tough political campaign rounds that his frail body had to endure. His successor Ahmad and other Kelantan state executive council members visited Nik Aziz and took a picture with him in the hospital, after Ahmad's oath taking ceremony.

If one were to compare the way former Malacca chief minister Mohd Ali Rustam reacted to his defeat in the Bukit Katil parliamentary seat with Nik Aziz's humility, the difference is vast. Or, like heaven and earth, as some would say.

Nik Aziz certainly leaves behind a noble legacy for Ahmad and the other Pakatan leaders to emulate. It will be a gap tough to fill. Despite the people's loss of an esteemed leader, they do hope that Nik Aziz will see the day when Pakatan gets to rule Malaysia, as is his wish before death.

