

Awang Adek confident of seizing Kelantan
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Barisan Nasional said it was confident of seizing Kelantan in tomorrow's general elections, ending 18 years of Islamic rule. MCPX

Kelantan is the only state not held by BN and a victory there would be a major boost for Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is expected to lose ground elsewhere in the country.

After months of intensive campaigning including coalition promises of billions of dollars in development funds, analysts say the race with the PAS is neck-and-neck.

2004 breakdown of seats in kelantanBut Awang Adek Hussin, who is leading the coalition's charge to retake Kelantan and is tipped to be chief minister if the state changes hands, said he was confident of victory.

"We think we will win by a comfortable margin," he told AFP.

PAS controls the 45-seat state legislature with just a one-seat majority.

"If we can get 28 (seats) I will be happy. Anything more will be a bonus," he said.

PAS has changed tack in recent years, dropping the hardline rhetoric that alienated voters in 2004 elections and instead focusing on bread-and-butter issues such as improving welfare services and countering inflation.

"(PAS) has not been able to deliver on their promises because of sheer lack of funds and they are quick to make promises, new promises because they can't keep the old ones," Awang Adek said.

At the height of its power, PAS controlled Kelantan and neighbouring Terengganu state, which it won in 1999, but its goal of turning Malaysia into an Islamic state is credited with losing Terengganu in 2004.

PAS vice-president Husam Musa said most voters in Kelantan, which is one of Malaysia's poorest states, still supported the party's brand of spiritual development.

"We will do well as we have the people's support," he told reporters, but added that he was concerned vote buying and electoral fraud could skew the results.

"This could mean nothing if the BN uses money to buy votes and if there are phantom voters introduced into the state," he said.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch said this week that Malaysians will be denied a fair vote in Saturday's general election, accusing the government of muzzling the opposition and manipulating the electoral process.