

**PAS wins big with gentler image : analysts**  
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PAS made huge strides in weekend elections, by putting on a moderate face and dropping fundamentalist rhetoric that had alienated voters, analysts said today. MCPX

The opposition party made a remarkable recovery after 2004 polls when its calls for an Islamic state to be imposed in the multicultural country were soundly rejected by voters.

The conservative party of Muslim scholars absorbed that painful lesson, shifting away from its fire-and-brimstone rhetoric and even reaching out to ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.

It was rewarded with a big win in its heartland of Kelantan which it had held by a slim majority, and is expected to join coalitions to rule three of the four states wrested from the mighty Barisan Nasional coalition.

It also claimed 23 seats in the national parliament, from just six before.

"There was a big shift in PAS' attitude by dropping any mention of plans to set up an Islamic state," said political analyst Shahrudin Badaruddin.

"Instead it concentrated on the idea of a compassionate and welfare-like state," he said.

While the Barisan Nasional dangled billions of dollars in development projects for the impoverished Malay heartlands, PAS offered its brand of pious values and sedate economic growth.

pas kl event 030308 nik azizKelantan Mentri Besar Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat hailed the "tsunami" of electoral support for the party in a victory speech that reflected its inclusive new approach.

"The people who are not Muslim, the Chinese, the Indians and (other minorities) now clearly accept our Islamic governance despite attempts by the BN's throwing of money and promises of development," he said.

PAS' last big gains were in 1999 when it captured Terengganu, leading it to believe Malaysians were willing to accept a hardline Islamic government, Shahrudin said.

But its tough line, including prohibitions on nightclubs, skimpy clothes and alcohol, coupled with excitement over Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's new administration, saw it lose Terengganu in 2004.

"The new PAS agenda was more appealing and the Malay heartland agreed that basic economic issues had yet to be addressed by the BN regardless of promised development projects," Shahrudin said.

"As a result, there was a coming together of forces in the various states as the Malay swing against the government coincided with big swings in the Chinese and Indian communities, something which has never happened before."

## **PAS, DAP 'must put differences aside'**

Political analyst Tricia Yeoh (right) said PAS' greater acceptance of minorities was key to its success.

"This signalled their need for support from non-Muslim voters who did not disappoint them, and backed what is an essentially Islamic government," said Yeoh, from the Centre for Public Policy Studies thinktank.

Chinese and Indians living in Kelantan, which PAS has ruled for 18 years, mostly have few complaints and say they are free to practice their religions and cultural traditions.

In a concession to minorities, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang said its new government in Kedah would give seats on its ruling committee to non-Muslims.

"We will offer two state exco posts to non-Muslims in the Kedah state government to recognise the role they played in our victory," he said.

Hadi Awang said there would not be any dramatic changes for non-Muslims in the new PAS-ruled Kedah, unlike when it took over Kelantan in 1990, and it intended to respect minority rights.

"Whatever we (restrict), it will be in consultation with the various races living in these states," he said.

"Whatever is allowed by their religion we will not interfere in but what is banned in Islam, we will forbid for Muslims."

Shahrudin says the challenge is now for PAS to find a viable arrangement with the DAP with which it must work to control some of the newly transferred state parliaments.

"Being the party of Islamic scholars, PAS will now have to tread a much more moderate line in ensuring that they can form a coalition with the DAP," he said.

"If they can do this, there will for the first time be a viable opposition coalition facing off the government in parliament," he added.

PAS vice-president Husam Musa said the opposition parties, including former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim's PKR, must put their differences aside.

"We must now try and unify and bring the races together and to pursue a more mainstream agenda," he said.

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