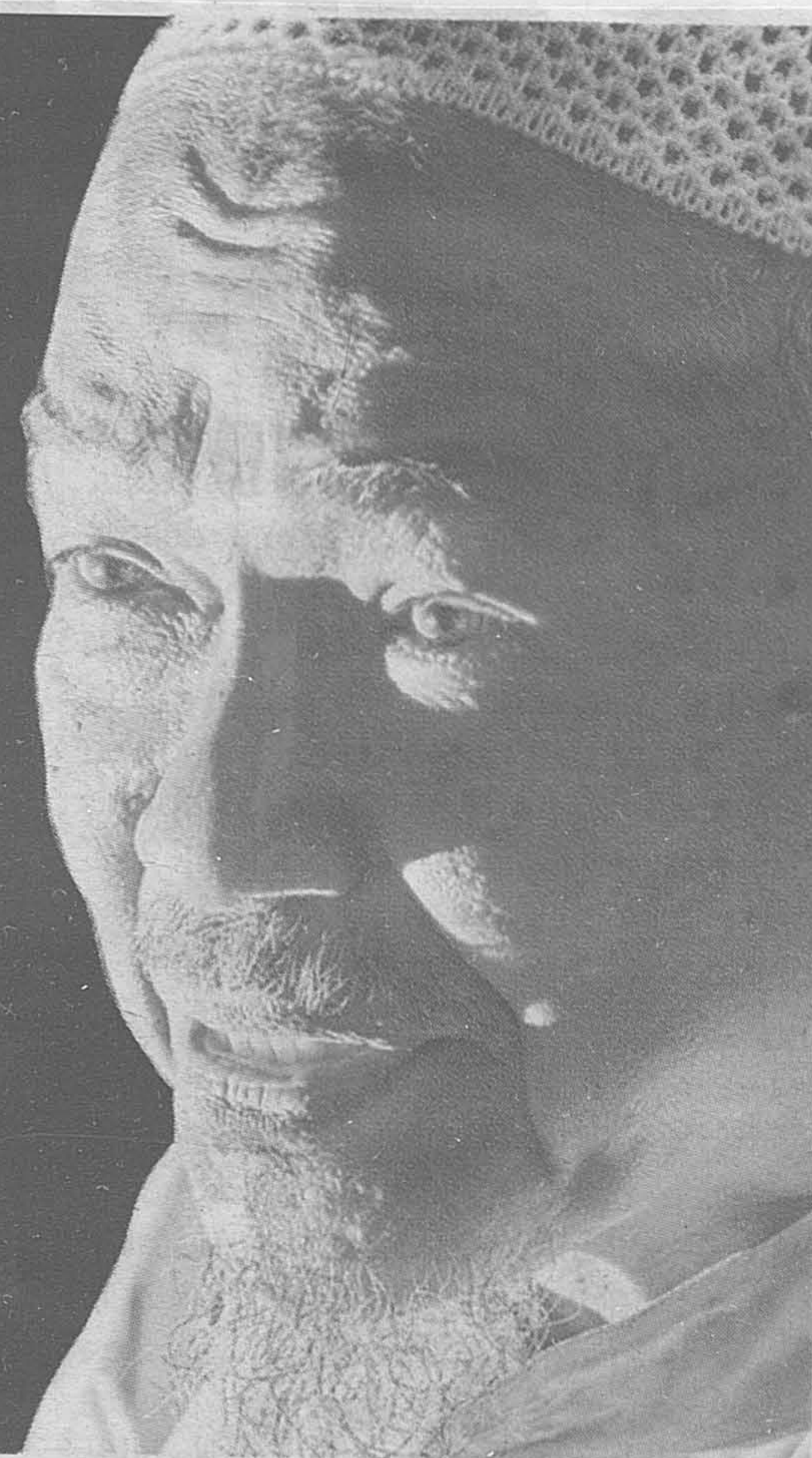


Sitting near the entrance of a surau at the Pusat Tarbiyah Islamiah Kelantan in Pengkalan Chepa, where Pas is holding its three-day assembly beginning Friday, the party's spiritual leader and Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat told ZUBAIDAH ABU BAKAR yesterday he would not let his talent go to waste by quitting his posts. The 76-year-old politician has offered to contest in the next general election and wants to continue to be the menteri besar until the time comes for him to let go

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# I have influence and won't let this go to waste



**Q:** You have led Kelantan for 17 years but in the last general election, Pas only managed a paper-thin victory. Will the people of Kelantan give their support to Pas in the next general election?

**A:** We have seen good returns spiritually and physically. Contrary to allegations that the state would be chaotic under Pas rule, Malays and Chinese are living in harmony since we took over. We see development and progress taking shape. You can see this for yourself if you take a drive around town. Pas is not an outdated party. Yes, we restricted and banned certain cultural performances like the *menora* (Thai-originated ancient dance) and *makyong* (Kelantan Malay traditional musical drama) because they contradict the teachings of Islam, but we still allow any form of performances that is confined to Islamic teachings. Only the traditional *wayang kulit* (shadow play) is banned, but the new version which carries positive messages to children and youths can still be performed.

That is why I am asking delegates for the *muktamar* (assembly) to choose leaders who can bring about development and progress to the people to lead the party.

**Q:** Is Pas still relevant as the party had fared badly in the last general election?

**A:** Elections in Malaysia are guided elections because the people are not given an opportunity to make their choices freely, like in America. Take the Ijok by-election as an example. An immediate approval of RM40 million was approved to fish for votes. Despite the uneven playing field, Pas is happy that many Umno supporters have joined us. They joined us not for monetary gains because we do not

have money, nor are they being forced to do so. Umno should be ashamed for forcing people to take their side.

**Q:** So you are confident the people will continue to support Pas?

**A:** If there are no threats (from Umno) of not giving free textbooks to children or the RM150 welfare aid payments, God willing, there is no reason why the people cannot accept Pas. If not for such threats, there is no reason why people would accept Umno.

**Q:** But Pas won with slim majorities in Kelantan, lost Terengganu (which was won in 1999 general election) and also seats in other states. Is this not an indication that the party is losing its grip?

**A:** We won with slim majorities because (Umno) made development promises. That is okay, because Pas has proven itself in the 17 years it ruled Kelantan that people of all races can live in peace.

**Q:** Does your health permit you to shoulder the responsibilities entrusted by the party on you?

**A:** Sometimes I feel very tired having to speak at ceramah at night, working in the office during the day and also, more importantly, having to counter and correct anti-Islam articles published in the newspapers. This is most important to me.

**Q:** You are holding three important posts — that of menteri besar, *mursyidul am* (spiritual guide) and Kelantan Pas commissioner. Can you cope with all these now?

**A:** Actually you missed another post — that of Tok Guru (religious master). I don't know who ap-

pointed me (as Tok Guru) but everywhere, be they Chinese or Malays, they call me "Tok Guru". This is recognition which comes with heavy responsibilities because I have to live up to the image whether I am using the cap of a menteri besar, a *mursyidul am* or a state commissioner. Since a Tok Guru will remain one until the hereafter, the recognition is a burden to me because I have to cautiously guard my actions at the office, home, now and the hereafter.

**Q:** People say Pas is accepted by the people because of your personality.

**A:** It is the right of others how they want to perceive me. As a Tok Guru, I have to live up to the standards. If there are things I did that is not right, people must question them and I will improve and make changes. I had invited (popular singer) Mawi in my capacity as a Tok Guru because he can sing *nasyid* (Arabic-style religious song) well, he can recite the Quran well and has a good voice rendering the *marhaban* (praises for Prophet Muhammad), all of which is within the confines of Islamic teachings. I did not invite (Datuk) Siti (Nurhaliza) because I do not want her (to perform). Mawi is all right because we want to show the people that Islam does not forbid singing in the form of *marhaban*, for example.

**Q:** One day you will have to step down. Do you have a successor in Kelantan?

**A:** There are many second-tier leaders if I die. I am sure there are those who emulated me in many ways. It is all right if people do not want to emulate me as long as they emulate Prophet Muhammad.

**Q:** Will the people of Kelantan accept a new leader who is not an ulama or who does not have a religious background?

**A:** It is not I who would be picking my successor. It is in the hands of voters because they are the one who vote for that person.

**Q:** Many leaders name their successor. What about you?

**A:** I will not name my successor, and I do not like to point him out. Well, maybe I can whisper his name. I do not want people to feel offended. I leave it to the wisdom of Pas to choose a leader who will propagate Islam. Anybody who takes charge after me will not be the same as me since God does not create two people alike. But of course, he has to be one who is committed to Islam.

**Q:** Do you agree with the perception that Pas is too dependant on you?

**A:** This is like a child who is dependant on his father. They are dependant on me because I am the leader of the party. But at the same time, I am also dependant on others. I am thankful that people show respect to me, and I, at the same time, always pray to God to make people respect and God loves me.

**Q:** Is it true that you were not able to attend certain functions because of health problems?

**A:** I will not say many but there were some, on certain occasions, that I could not attend either because of overlapping events or because I was too tired. My doctor has advised me not to exert myself and to control my diet although I must admit that it is not easy for me to follow his advice because Kelantanese food has a lot of *san-*

*tan* (coconut milk).

**Q:** Do you have regular check-ups?

**A:** During my last visit to the National Heart Institute, the doctor said I have almost recovered from my heart problem. I am very happy that I am recovering, but I do feel tired at times. He advised me to drink a lot water and to take a nap if I am tired.

**Q:** Are you still fit to carry out all your duties?

**A:** Yes, *Alhamdulillah*. But I now allow my political secretary to write my comments based on my input. I, myself, do not write nowadays.

**Q:** Do you have a diabetic problem?

**A:** It's not serious, but my cholesterol is high.

**Q:** Does this mean that you are still able to continue leading the state?

**A:** Yes, because I was never tired mentally. I read a lot, especially on political issues, as I need to educate and create public awareness of such issues.

**Q:** Will you contest in the next elections if the party wants you to?

**A:** It is I who want to contest because it is my responsibility to do whatever I can to strengthen Islam. I am aware that I possess something in me which can inspire the spirit of the Muslims. I have influence, and I will not let this go to waste because it will be a sin.

If I contest and win, it is a bonus in our efforts to strengthen Islam. As long as I am alive, I will offer to contest in elections.

LEADERSHIP

PERDANA