

# Umno seeks to end 16-year Pas rule

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**KOTA BARU:** The battle for Kelantan has already begun as Pas and Umno have geared up their election machinery in what is expected to be the most observed contest in the next general election.

Pas has 23 seats and Umno 22 in the state assembly — only a seat away for the Barisan Nasional to end Pas' 16-year rule in the state.

Pas leaders have been claiming that the general election would be held later this year. BN, however, holds the mandate until the middle of 2009.

The state liaison committees of both parties officially launched their machinery over the weekend.

Leaders have told division and branch officials to intensify voter registration initiatives and start programmes to sell the party's message to the public.

The overriding strategy for both BN and Pas is to defend the seats they hold and attempt to take away 10 to 14 extra seats from the other party.

Focus would be on constituencies that were won in the 2004 general election by majorities of fewer than 1,000 votes.

Kelantan Umno leaders are feeling confident. For the first time since Pas took over the state in 1990, many feel there has been no better opportunity as now to end the state government's reign.

"In previous elections (1995, 1999 and 2004), there was a feeling among Kelantan Umno that taking over the state government was a

dream. Our best bet then was to make inroads.

"But today, the prize is within grasp. Kelantan Umno can finally take Kelantan," an optimistic Datuk Seri Annuar Musa, the party's state liaison chief told a gathering of branch information chiefs on Friday.

Annuar ordered the party machinery to roll out programmes, such as sport carnivals and religious seminars, at the more than 500 polling districts in the state so as to maximise participation at the grassroots-level.

Unlike conventional division-level programmes for parliamentary constituencies and which attract villagers near the event's venue, polling district programmes allow the party to cover more people and minutely gauge voters' reception to the party.

Both parties have also started a massive exercise to register new voters in each constituency, especially those they have identified as sympathisers and supporters.

Kelantan Umno information chief Che Alwi Ahmad said the party's message to voters was simple: Give Umno a chance to prove why it is so much better than Pas.

Kelantan Umno's platform is similar to that which it has used to much success in previous opposition-controlled areas — their track record in providing infrastructure development and socio-economic services that could boost the standard of living of the common man.

"Pas has had 16 years to govern.

"What has it done? Look all the good that Umno is doing in



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*Datuk Seri Annuar Musa  
Kelantan Umno state liaison chief*

Terengganu, the improvements that they are making to people's lives.

"Kelantan Umno can bring the same here. Just give us one more chance.

"This is a new team we are bringing in, not just recycling the same faces," said Che Alwi.

Terengganu Umno is luckier than its Kelantan counterpart as it wrested power from Pas just after a term.

Umno lost Terengganu in 1999 but recaptured the state in 2004.

Kelantan Pas secretary Takiyuddin Hassan is unfazed by Umno's confidence.

He claims that Umno's message was a rehash of the version employed in previous elections. "Our support in the state has increased since 2004," he said.

The next polls is arguably the most crucial for Pas and the party has been registering and preparing voter breakdowns in all areas since early last year.

The exercise involved regularly sifting through the elec-

toral rolls to identify changes in the voter population in each polling district so that the party can gauge support at any given time.

Strategies to remedy the slightest change in voter sentiment are quickly formulated to prevent a slide that could threaten overall performance.

In the words of a state Pas leader, the party's machinery has been told since last year that they are to be prepared for a general election "at any moment".

Veteran Kelantan political

observer Associate Professor Mohammad Agus Yusoff believes the state will be won on the issue of leadership as long as there are no major national issues.

Specifically, Umno must come up with a suitable counter to the cult personality that has developed around Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

The development carrot, Agus argues, is not as important as it is in other Malay belt states, such as Pahang, Terengganu or Kedah.

In his opinion, the Kelantan people are used to hardship.

The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political scientist based this assessment on the studies he conducted on voter profiles, starting with the 1959 general election.

Agus believes that the Kelantan people are a different breed of voters, more cunning and with priorities different from other rural voters.

"They are not hard up for luxuries. To them, Kelantan has roads, schools, public health facilities, everything for a functioning society, courtesy of the federal government.

"So in their mind, if they already get this from the federal government, even if it is a Pas-controlled state, why rock the boat?"

The pressure is on Umno and Annuar to ensure the right leader — the contender for the next menteri besar — has the full support of the usually fragmented state Umno.

Failing that, Kelantan Pas could break its own record of ruling the state. The first time around, Kelantan was under Pas for 18 years from 1959 to 1978.

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