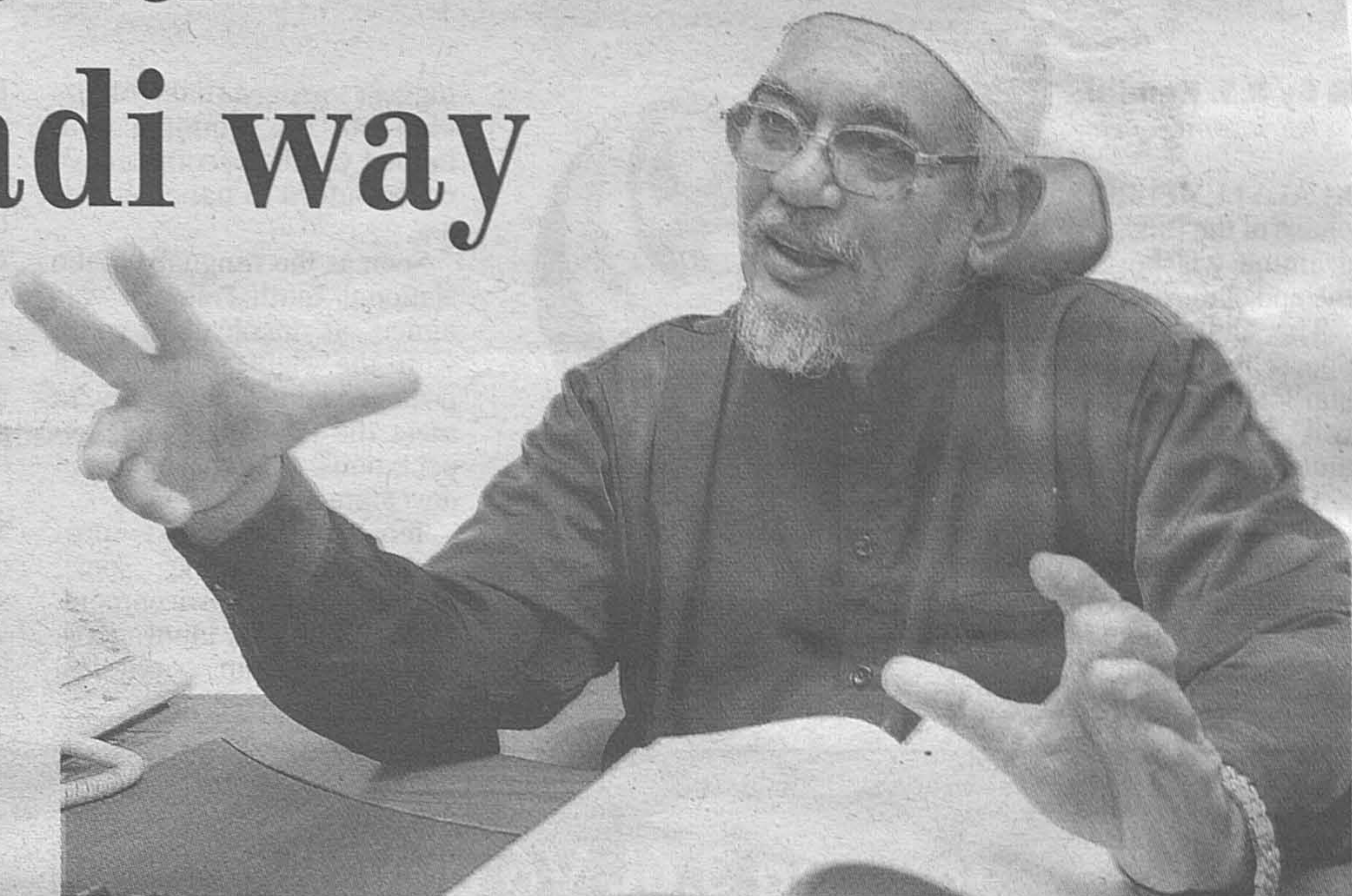


Rifts, change and balance the Hadi way

NST- 13/5/2007.

Pas party elections next month may turn out to be the most heated. There's speculation that the Young Turks will be challenged by a mostly older band of conservatives, some of whom were ousted in the last polls. Party president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang speaks to ZUBAIDAH ABU BAKAR and ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD on what he makes of the jostling for posts, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's dominance as the de-facto opposition leader and the future of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat



Q: Party spiritual adviser Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat is against holding elections at this year's assembly (muktamar), urging for a postponement as it could affect Pas unity ahead of the general election. But the central committee decided to go ahead anyway. Why?

A: That (Nik Aziz's statement) was a suggestion, which shows Pas is democratic. Our ulama are not theocrats. There is no theocracy in Islam. Islam is synonymous with democracy.

The view that Islam believes that ulama are *suci* (pure) and cannot be questioned is wrong. Only the Quran and Hadith are beyond question. In Islam, the leader has no veto power, not even the *Mursyidul Am* (spiritual adviser).

Those in favour of holding party elections argued that it would be a needed part of our preparations for the next general election, to update the party machinery with (the right) leaders.

It's like tightening the screws on the party election preparations by deciding whether to maintain the current leaders or supplement them with new ones, who can strengthen the party. This will, in turn, energise party members to work harder.

Q: If the jostling for posts occurs for even the highest positions — such as the deputy presidency, which reportedly will see a contest — won't it jeopardise preparations for the general election?

A: We will not be affected by (any such) contests, which are allowed by our constitution. We are, however, driven by party ethics, derived from moral values as contained in Islam — no money politics, no threats, no putting down one another.

In Pas, anyone who tries to bring in the culture of insulting others in the party will fall in a party election. That has been the culture we've inculcated. As long

as party members keep to party ethics, I will give my consent to contests.

Q: There is a news report saying that the party deputy president, Nasharudin Mat Isa, will be challenged by Datuk Haron Taib, who heads the party's ulama wing. How do you see this matter?

A: I have not yet received information on this. Anyway, it is the right of the divisions to nominate who they want.

Q: What's your advice to the contestants in the event that a contest for the deputy presidency occurs?

A: That we must hold to the values of our party, which are derived from Islam.

Q: If the contests for positions become heated, would the Syura council (ulama council, which decides on policy) step in and arrange for compromises?

A: This "if" scenario means you ask of possibilities. When the possibility of this happening is really there, then I will answer.

Q: Surely a contest for the deputy presidency is something that has rarely happened, with the last notable case being in 1981, right before the coup against Pas leader Tan Sri Asri Muda?

A: I don't think that's correct. In fact, contests for the top posts in Pas have happened, even from the early days of the party, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

Q: Have overheated contests for top posts ever led to a split in Pas?

A: No. And even if it (a split) happens, we can solve it. As far as I remember, a (serious) split only happened when we joined Barisan Nasional in the 1970s. We joined because of the May 13,

1969 (race riots) issue. We agreed to join and be a part of a coalition government, but with certain conditions.

There was a split (in Pas) then, but we still managed to close ranks. So it was something we could handle.

Now, in the muktamar, we've not yet seen a rift occurring as a result of contests.

Q: What's your assessment on the performance of the current party leaders, especially the younger group which came to power in the last election?

A: Pas is doing increasingly well, and this is positive, because we are receiving new members (at a growing rate), no less than 1,000 each time our central committee meets (usually once a month).

And we have quality members, whom we can depend upon during general elections. We now have more than 800,000 members, and we are getting close to the one million figure.

Q: At last year's muktamar, delegates questioned why the party was allowing Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to assume the leadership role in the opposition, when Pas was the much larger party compared with Parti Keadilan Rakyat, and when you were available.

A: Pas does not just look at itself. We also look at the fact that change in the country needs the participation of all opposition parties and the multi-racial communities.

To gain acceptance, we need to be accepted by the multi-racial people of this country.

What's really important for Pas is that it increases its own strength. If Pas is strong, then Pas will shine, no matter who grabs the limelight.

If Pas is weak and I'm the one who is pushed forward (to lead), then it will be meaningless. What's important is Pas' own strength, because that is the

thing that will determine our role in fighting for change.

Q: What about DAP which still refuses to co-operate with Pas?

A: Until today, we have no formal and open co-operation with DAP. But Pas is with all parties on certain issues, including even Umno, not just DAP.

For example, in the campaign against the spread of weapons of mass destruction, we are with Umno. On being against the ISA, we are with the DAP. But in terms of co-operating in facing the general election, as of today we are working mainly with PKR.

Q: But won't a failure to establish an electoral pact with DAP in the next general election create problems in terms of seat distribution among Pas, PKR and the DAP?

A: These issues will sort themselves out on their own, according to the conditions and realities at the given time. Surely Pas won't contest in non-Muslim majority seats; we contest only in places appropriate to us.

At the same time, we have an understanding with PKR, so this will develop on its own.

Q: What are Pas' target states in the next general election?

A: We will focus on states where we are strong. Until today, we've had experience ruling in Kelantan and Terengganu. We have significant strength in Kedah, Perlis, Pahang, Perak and Selangor. But, at the same time, this will also depend on our understanding with PKR.

Q: How far will Pas give way to PKR if it wants to contest more seats in the coming general election?

A: We have a national committee with members from both parties, and discussions are ongoing.

Q: How will Pas' aspirations of

establishing an Islamic state be explained to voters in the coming general election?

A: What's important to us is to highlight matters where we have common ground. There is common understanding among Muslims and non-Muslims about wanting to uphold justice and fight injustice.

What's important is resolving the common ground problems first when wanting to implement change.

Q: Since 1999, Pas has not been highlighting its "Islamic state" aspirations. Why?

A: Pas members understand that this issue should not be the main one used to gain voter support, because we need to dispel the misunderstanding non-Muslims have about Islam.

Q: How do you see Pas' chances of retaining Kelantan, in view of the fact that the party now has only a one-seat advantage over the Barisan Nasional in the state assembly?

A: We see the people's support increasing for us. The state government's activities (such as aid for the disadvantaged) are also helping.

Q: How do you see Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat in Kelantan. Will he continue to be Menteri Besar if Pas retains Kelantan?

A: He continues to enjoy support because of his image as a "clean" leader with a moderate lifestyle, despite having served three terms as Menteri Besar. His influence is still strong.

I'm confident that Kelantan has a good team of second liners and is a good source of human resources; many of the top figures in the civil service and the corporate world are from Kelantan.

(Whether or not he continues) is up to Kelantan Pas to evaluate. We (Pas national leadership) will give our views on the matter.