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Revered Tok Guru a conscious choice

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IT was a photograph that spoke a thousand words.

Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat was depicted with his *serban*-clad head bowed and hands extended outwards in a gesture of prayer.

Those who saw the photograph, which made its appearance towards the tail end of the campaign, may have felt melancholy, a feeling that could very well have been translated into votes for Pas.

Some are going by this, saying that it could have been behind the overwhelming number of seats won by Pas this time around.

This is especially so in the wake of an appeal by the 77-year-old Pas spiritual leader to the people of Kelantan to vote in the party that he has helmed for 18 years.

His call went out after a spirited effort by the mammoth Barisan Nasional election machinery to oust the Islamic party that has ruled the state for almost two decades.

Understandably, the sight of the septuagenarian in prayer may have led to the extremely high turnout of voters in the state with many returning from outstation to vote.

On Saturday, they gave Pas the mandate to rule for another term.

The results were overwhelming with the party increasing its stake from 23 seats to 38 seats.

Its partner, Parti Keadilan Rakyat, won a seat, leaving the BN with only six seats.

Pas also won nine parlia-

KELANTAN ANALYSIS

By Alina Simon



STATE SEATS

UMNO 6

mentary seats with PKR getting three, again reducing the BN's share to only two.

Even in the face of the Barisan Nasional onslaught, the party managed to hold its own.

From being a party which initially seemed to be on the downslide following the 2004 general election which saw its majority trimmed to almost half, Pas rebounded with vigour.

The BN's campaign slogan of "*cuba, try, test*" failed with the Kelantanese love for anything religious overtaking the clear promise of fiscal advantages paraded before them by the BN.

For migrant Kelantanese, especially the younger generation returning home to vote, the photograph clearly struck a chord.

A 29-year-old who returned from Shah Alam to vote in her hometown of Bachok said:

"I admire and respect Tok Guru (Nik Aziz's nickname). He is the heart and soul of Kelantan," she said.

The mother of one, like many of her peers, keep tabs on the situation in the state through browsing on the Net, reading blogs and online newspapers.

As one local veteran politician put it, the people of Kelantan are bonded to Pas, not just out of religious conviction but due to its background.

Just like Umno has its beginnings in Johor, Kelantan is Pas' home.

And the fact that the much-revered Nik Aziz, whose supporters would gladly finish his glass of left-over beverage for the *berkat* (blessings) is still around provides a much-needed boost for the party.

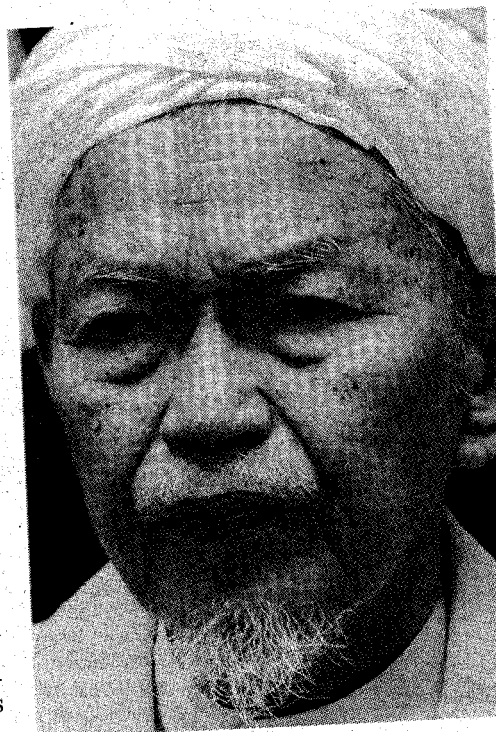
The boundless affection for the state, party and leader perhaps explains the general reluctance among the thousands of Kelantanese working elsewhere to change their voting address.

Some say the people of Kelantan do not want "outsiders" to dominate the state.

"They are afraid of outsiders bringing in new ideas and values which would run contrary to their unique culture," said an observer.

Though Barisan Nasional may have made some significant inroads over the years, perhaps it is just not enough to quake these sentiments.

Putting the obvious emotional balance in favour of Pas aside, the BN's failure to achieve its dreams of wresting control of the state may also lie in the fact that the state BN is still mired in the same old problems.



Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat is indispensable to Kelantanese who have identified themselves with his leadership for the past 18 years.

Internal fighting, the *cah keting* (sabotage) culture and the sort of leadership that is out of touch with the grassroots may also be blamed.

There are stories circulating here of BN leaders' habit of flashing their wealth and power which does not go down well with locals.

Regular visits by the national BN leaders, especially in the run up to the election, might too, have worked against their interests.

Observers say their fancy clothes and vehicles and their habit of criticising everything about the state could have turned off locals.

"Nobody likes it when a visitor comes to your home and starts mouthing off about the decor, the furniture or even your family.

"Everyone has their own dignity and nobody likes being told off in their own home by outsiders," said a local petty trader.

As the party prepares to form the new state government, state BN leaders are

urging their members to stay calm and regroup to assess the damage.

State BN chief Datuk Annuar Musa, who also lost in his bid for the Ketereh parliamentary seat, admitted miscalculating on the support of Kelantanese working in other states.

He had based this on the 2004 general election where many had voted for Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi whose appeal had taken the nation by storm.

He said the party had not realised that urban sentiments in the west coast of the peninsula over national issues had been "imported" into Kelantan by returning sons and daughters of the soil.

The failure also extended to misjudging the impact of online websites and blogs on young outstation voters.

Annuar said the party would be doing a lot of soul searching.

"Now is not the time to blame anybody. We must stand united behind our leader and show solidarity."