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PAS-Umno unity govt in Kelantan seen possible with Nik Aziz's passing

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by AZREEN HANI

THE death of PAS spiritual leader and longest serving Kelantan Mentri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat may strengthen Umno's influence in the state and raises the prospect that the two parties could jointly administer the state.

"Without Tok Guru (Nik Aziz) and cessation of internal bickering among PAS members, Umno may be able to increase support for it in Kelantan," Universiti Malaysia Sabah's political scientist Dr Mohd Noor Yazid told *The Malaysian Reserve*.

However, Mohd Noor said PAS will still hold sway in Kelantan with or without Umno, at least for the moment.

"It is too early to tell since no top leaders from both parties have mooted the idea to sit and discuss about it," he said.

"I think if Umno shows its sincere intention to work together with PAS for the benefit of uniting Malays and Islam, it is likely that these parties may form a unity government.

"Whether PAS members like it or not, recent events have made seem as if the party is not on the same page with DAP or PKR. PAS needs strong backing for the implementation of hudud and Umno has shown an open mind about it being tabled," he added.

Nanyang Technological University's Rajaratnam School of International Studies Assoc Prof Dr Farish A Noor wrote that Nik Aziz's passing raises

several questions about PAS' future and its position in the Pakatan Rakyat coalition.

"Firstly, with him gone, it is unclear to what extent the reformist-modernist 'Erdogan' faction can hold back the growing demands for PAS to break away from the Opposition coalition and to join other Malay-Muslim parties to uphold the goal of Malay-Muslim pre-eminence in the country.

"Notwithstanding Nik Aziz's pragmatic approach to coalition-building, there have also been protests from within PAS about how the party had grown too close to the DAP and was in danger of compromising its Islamist credentials as a result," Farish wrote.

The unity government was

strongly rejected by the late Nik Aziz, with him once quoted as saying that he will not allow it to happen as long as he lives.

Mohd Noor said Nik Aziz's sentiment is understandable as he was one of the key figures during the cooperation between PAS and Umno in the 1970s.

"Tok Guru had been through the time when Umno and PAS cooperated and broke up in 1982. He might believe that Umno only needs the PAS' support when it is weak and will dismiss the party when it is strong.

"As I have said earlier, unless Umno shows its sincerity to PAS, the unity government will not happen anytime soon," said Farish in his article.