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A legend and - , a humble man

The soft-spoken and unassuming Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat changed the rules of politics in his own way and his passing marks the end of an era in the politics of PAS and Kelantan.

It seemed like an entire nation was watching and praying for Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat in his final days on earth.

There was a sense that an era had ended when the PAS leader breathed his last. But those who had watched his political journey knew that this deeply pious man had accepted death the way he embraced life.

His entire life had been in preparation for the next world.

Nik Aziz, 84, passed away last night at about 9.40pm after a long struggle with digestion issues, heart problems and prostate cancer that was said to have spread to his lungs.

He had suffered pain but he endured his ill health in his usual stoic and uncomplaining way.

His health had deteriorated dramatically earlier last month and PAS leaders had rushed to Kota Baru to be close to him. They thought that the end was near but the elderly man was tenacious and made a feeble recovery.

His doctors arranged for him to return home where he could rest in a more comfortable and familiar environment, with his family around him.

A few days ago, his condition took a turn for the worse and he was readmitted to hospital.

At about 8.55pm last night, doctors advised his family to take him back. It was a timely decision because he died barely an hour later.

He was barely conscious when PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, accompanied by his political secretary Dr Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, visited him in hospital on Wednesday.

"Tuan Guru Hadi is on the way to Kota Baru now. It is a great loss," said Dr Samsuri.

There will be an outpouring of condolences and eulogy for this rather extraordinary man who was the PAS Mursyidul Am and former Kelantan Menteri Besar.

He was one of a kind - hence, the sense of mourning and loss, especially among PAS members. As far as they are concerned, there will never be another leader in Kelantan like him or for that matter, in the country.

The diminutive and soft-spoken preacher-turned-politician was largely unknown outside of Kelantan. He was not a forceful speaker and the crowds were drawn towards the fire-and-brimstone style of Hadi, then a



young and radical preacher.

But a legend was born when PAS took Kelantan in 1990. Nik Aziz knew little about governing a state but he had real convictions about Islam and that was his foundation.

It was not easy with the mighty Barisan Nasional breathing down his neck and pointing out every mistake he made. And he did make more than his share of mistakes because it would never be easy trying to apply ideas generated during the Holy Prophet's time into the modern world.

But God was probably on his side and his personal reputation and integrity had been central to the party's control of Kelantan.

He was not an intellectual like Hadi but he was known for his commitment to Tarbiyyah, the internalisation of Islam or the inculcation of the religion in everyday life.

To him, Islam was inseparable from all aspects of life, be it personal or political.

He was the trailblazer in the notion of an Islamic administration and declared Kelantan as "Serambi Mecca" or the verandah of Islam's holiest city.

Many have wondered what it is about his government that makes Kelantanese support it through so many general elections.

A large part of it had to do with his personal integrity. They could see that he was a genuinely God-fearing man.

Kelantanese were hungry for a Malay leader who was religious, honest and clean and whom they could trust. They did not mind that he was basically a *kampung* man who knew little about economics and could not speak English.

His house was not very different from theirs, he dressed like them and he did not amass great wealth despite being in power for 23 years.

Nik Aziz died without realising his life-long dream to implement hudud law. His retirement was spent doing what he loved - praying, giving religious lessons and reading.