

Ahead of polls, Umno Youth begins charming Kelantan
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KOTA BARU, Oct 29 — Umno Youth is leading the campaign to win Kelantan from PAS with weekly ceramahs, career and housing fairs and constant visits to list down and build up the complaints about the Islamist party's 20-year rule in the Malay heartland state.

The campaign, titled "Gelombang merah gelombang rakyat", also uses different ways to reach out to potential voters such as CD "documentaries" that highlight alleged mismanagement of the PAS government and dikir barat parodies criticising the Islamist party, which is led by the popular but ageing Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat.

"Twelve out of 14 state division leaders in Kelantan are below 50 years old... the campaign to win back Kelantan is being led by young, hardworking grassroots leaders... we are the ones who you will probably not hear about, but have been working round the clock to expose the wrongdoings of the PAS government," Pengkalan Chepa Umno Youth division chief Che Othman Che Wil told The Malaysian Insider in an interview this week.

Che Othman said the Umno Youth campaign is being led by young leaders. The 50-year-old believes that the key problem affecting the state is its lack of development, and says that PAS is to blame for it.

"The PAS government in Kelantan has become complacent... we have so many local development issues. We are the only state in the country to have excess of water but yet shortage of clean water. There are also no job opportunities, state government is not helping out businesses, resulting in Kelantanese migrating to other states," he said.

State Umno working secretary Mohamad Zaiden Abdul Rahim told The Malaysian Insider that his party recently organised a career and housing fair at the Umno headquarters in Kota Baru, and that the turnout was "promising".

"We go to the ground, unlike PAS assemblymen who do not... we offer Kelantan folk different forms of aid via federal agencies, bypassing the state government, so that people now know they don't need the state government to help them, we can offer them much more... we offer development.

"We have 2,000 Youth members on motorcycles riding to PAS strongholds, telling the people in plain simple language that a vote for PAS means two steps back... vote for Umno, you vote progress. We don't promise things we cannot deliver," said Mohamad Zaiden.

The Internet has also become a primary medium for Kelantan Umno Youth's campaign, with hundreds of blogs and websites set up by cybertroopers to attack the Kelantan PAS government.

"We did not appreciate the effectiveness of the Internet in the last general election but we have learnt now. Today, if the Kelantan government makes a mistake, within hours it will be posted in hundreds of blogs," said the Youth wing's "Unit Media Baru" committee member Eizwan Abdullah.

Umno managed to capture only six out of 45 state seats in Kelantan in the last general elections. But it retook the Galas state seat in a 2010 by-election which saw an 82 per cent turnout which analysts say was due to support from first-time voters.

Mohamed Zaiden said 'we don't promise things we cannot deliver'.
"It's a work in progress, but we are confident that Umno's time in Kelantan has now come. If Umno can win back the state it will be a great push for Barisan Nasional (BN) in other states," said Che Othman.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Umno and BN are banking on Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed to again lead the coalition in the next election as its menteri besar-designate although the Umno leader is not as popular as Nik Aziz.

PAS officials are worried about succession in the state, pointing out that Nik Aziz turns 80 this year but a successor is not in sight. There have been hints of a power struggle but the Islamist party has shown enough discipline to keep the issue out of sight.

Mustapa, who is the international trade and industry minister, has been working with Umno officials on its "Gelombang Merah" campaign to take back the state lost two decades ago.

It is learnt that most of the Umno candidates in the next election will be from the younger set as part of BN's strategy to show renewal and youth against the ageing list from PAS.

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