

**Kelantan diaspora deciding factor in polls, says state opposition chief**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KOTA BHARU, Nov 2 — Some 80,000 Kelantanese living in other states who return home to vote will determine which party rules the Malay heartland state in the upcoming general election, predicts Umno leader Datuk Che Alwi Ahmad.

Calling them “fence-sitters,” the state opposition leader claimed the number of Kelantanese living in other states currently amounts to nearly 10 per cent of the total electorate of 825,461 as of this July, and that many more are finding employment beyond Kelantan’ borders due to the lack of job opportunities there.

“There are about 80,000 fence-sitters, Kelantan folk who have migrated to other states and are working there who will return home to vote when the general election comes.

“Local votes are important yes, but so are the votes coming from Kelantan folk in other states ... these are the people who will vote based on issues. They are the ones who will decide whether PAS stays on to run Kelantan,” he told The Malaysian Insider recently in an exclusive interview.

The Umno leader said voter support in the state between PAS and Umno was “more or less equal” and that “fence-sitters” would tilt the balance in favour of the more popular party.

Che Alwi believes that while local issues in the state, such as those related to development, trade and water supply, will affect the vote swing in the upcoming polls, national issues will play a part in garnering voter support in Kelantan for either coalition.

“If you can separate national and local issues, we’ll already have formed a new state government by now,” the Kok Lanas state assemblyman said sarcastically, adding that Kelantanese folk had very strong views about the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) federal government.

“Government teachers, servants, these are Kelantanese working in Kuala Lumpur and they care about national issues that may not necessarily affect Kelantan directly. Toll hikes may affect a Kelantanese in Shah Alam who will complain about it to his parents in Kota Bharu,” he added.

The Malaysian Insider understands that Kelantan Umno has begun campaigning ahead of general elections expected early next year. Umno has not been in government in Kelantan since 1990.

Che Alwi also said the “fence-sitter” vote would help Umno’s chances to win state seats which they lost by a narrow margin in the last state polls.

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

The Umno leader believes both local and national issues are of equal importance to the

Kelantan diaspora. — Picture by Choo Choy May

State seats which Umno lost by less than a 1,000-vote margin include Pengkalan Kubor, Wakaf Baru, Periok, Gual, Bukit Tunku, Selising, Semerak, Gaal, Kemuning, Air Lanas and Dabong.

But the Umno man remained cautious over his party's chances to wrest the state from PAS, saying that the most difficult mindset to overcome was the support people had for the state government despite their "glaring shortcomings."

Heaving heavy sighs, Che Alwi explained how many issues raised have been sidestepped by state leaders.

"When you ask about the lack of development in the state, the federal government becomes the scapegoat, state leaders will say Putrajaya is against helping Kelantan.

"The same goes if I ask why company A gets a state project instead of company B ... the state government will say it's the solution they have reached after solat istiqarah (prayers) ... how do you go against people who use religion to justify their actions?" he told The Malaysian Insider.

He pointed out, for example, that the service centre for PAS state assemblyman Wan Ismail Wan Jusoh for Melor had yet to complete construction, claiming that there was nowhere within the constituency for people to air their grievances.

"They end up complaining to the Umno office here ... it's hard when you are dealing with people who are so recalcitrant. What I try to do is develop the state as best as I can, forget whether it's PAS or Umno doing it."

Che Alwi said that what Umno would be able to bring to the table should it come to power in Kelantan is bringing an end to the state's stalled development.

"Aid for the state, oil royalty, all of these things ... it's just down to the working relationship between the state government and the federal government. Take a look at Penang; politics aside, the working relationship on a state-federal level is good ... that is what PAS has not been able to achieve."

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