

**After Nik Aziz, poser over Kelantan's next leader**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 8 — After two decades of Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat's administration in Kelantan, the state ruling party may be better served if it readies a new leader to replace its ageing menteri besar, a Singapore paper has suggested.

In a news analysis today, the Straits Times' Salim Osman wrote that doubts have been rising over the 82-year-old PAS leader's grip on power and ability to continue taking Kelantan, described as "a rural state of farmers, fishermen and small businessmen", forward and meet the aspirations of its much younger electorate who form two-thirds of the state's population.

"People outside Kelantan are wondering how PAS can maintain its hold for more than two decades when records show that, in terms of achievement, there is nothing much in the ruling party's history that can show it provided good governance," the writer quoted former Election Commission chief Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman as saying in a newspaper commentary in January.

The writer noted that Nik Aziz has been state leader for nearly 23 years, the second-longest in the country after Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud. The 76-year-old recently celebrated his 32nd year in office.

"Can he win over the younger voters who make up two-thirds of the state's constituency?"

"Can he understand their needs and aspirations?" the writer asked.

He noted that weaknesses in the Islamic cleric's long administration had led to land scandals and growing concern over the high rate of HIV cases, divorce cases and drug abuses and these have been exploited by critics.

The writer also questioned Nik Aziz's health and cited an anonymous PAS insider who noted the menteri besar may have to relinquish his position mid-term if he wins the upcoming elections.

Nik Aziz may no longer be physically fit to take on the heavy duties of state, the writer suggested.

"The clock is now ticking for the Islamic party to prepare the ground for a successor," he said.

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