

Nik Aziz the target of Muslim scholars
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KOTA BARU, May 4 — Some Muslims scholars and intellectuals have formed an informal group to defend Islam in Kelantan — not against Umno but against Mentri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat and the ruling PAS.

The Straits Times reported today that the group claims to be non-partisan but receives financial aid from Umno for its Islamic schools in Kelantan. The members say they are disillusioned with PAS, and accuse it of hijacking Islam for its political agenda, the Singapore daily reported.

Some Muslim scholars are taking aim at Nik Aziz for his views on Islam. — File picOne such opposing scholar is preacher Rujhan Abdul Rahman, a member of Kelantan-based Islamic education movement Pendita. A graduate in Islamic studies from the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, he joined other Kelantan clerics in opposing PAS five years ago.

He accuses Nik Aziz of trying to please leaders of the Chinese-based DAP. PAS and the DAP are partners in the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

Nik Aziz had weighed in on a recent controversy over whether non-Muslims can use the word "Allah". He says yes, because the father of Prophet Muhammad was named Abdullah, or slave of Allah, before the founding of Islam.

Not so, says Rujhan.

Rujhan recently went to a remote kampung in the state to present his arguments to villagers and highlight the wrongs in the statements and behaviour of PAS.

Even in the rural heartland where Nik Aziz is adored with cult-like reverence, such ceramahs are likely to have an impact, though it is hard to say to what extent, The Straits Times reported.

"PAS will feel the heat and under the current election fever, the party will view them as a threat," the daily quoted Dr Mohd Nawawi Ismail of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan in Bachok as saying.

The opposing scholars run a ceramah circuit in Kelantan and other states, complementing Umno's strategy of countering PAS clerics with its own team of scholars who quote Quranic verses and Islamic history.

The daily reported that the emergence of the religious opposition is worrying some in PAS as it challenges Nik Aziz's authority as an Islamic spiritual leader. But Deputy Mentri Besar Ahmad Yakob dismisses the opposition as liars. "They have no etiquette because they

ridicule and tell lies about Tuan Guru," he was quoted as saying, referring to Nik Aziz.

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