

**In filling Nik Aziz's shoes, Ahmad Yakub promises a better Kelantan**  
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Datuk Ahmad Yakub, the newly-appointed Menteri Besar of Kelantan, recently celebrated his 100th day in office on August 20. He has come under close scrutiny having succeeded one of the most prominent figures in Kelantan, or even Malaysia - Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

The 82-year-old Nik Aziz had stepped down after the 13th General Election after 23 years of service as the state MB.

Ahmad admits that filling in the big shoes of his predecessor is a daunting task but insists he is up for the challenge.

Earlier in the week, he sat down for a chat with The Malaysian Insider at JKR 10, his official residence in Kota Baru, to talk about his interest in politics, state issues like the controversial People's Highway, water woes, Datuk Husam Musa and of course, his first 100 days as MB.

How did you get involved in politics?

Ahmad Yakub : I was actually the son of a politician, who was an ulama but with political affiliations. I studied at an Arab religious school and my teachers during the time of Datuk Asri (Muda) were all involved in politics. One of my teachers was Ustaz Yahaya Osman. I wanted to help the Islamic people when I returned to Kelantan which was when YAB Tok Guru (Nik Aziz) had been appointed as the state Menteri Besar. I then became involved with PAS in Tumpat and became the treasurer there. That was the beginning for me and the rest is history.

How did you become the deputy menteri besar and later the menteri besar?

That is a long story. Fundamentally, I am a teacher and never thought much about becoming a politician. Becoming a menteri besar had never even crossed my mind. All I thought about was to help with the Islamic struggle here. I was appointed as MB in a daily meeting (PAS Kelantan's Dewan Harian) on May 6 after the 13th General Election. It seems that YAB Tok Guru had obtained the approval of PAS president (Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang) prior to that apparently. My name was proposed to take over Tok Guru's place as menteri besar. Mine was the only name mentioned. At first, I rejected it as I thought my friends were more capable as I am quite far from Tok Guru's position..based on his knowledge and capabilities. But then, it was decided by the syura, which I had never asked for. I remember a hadis which said "You should not ask for a position to be a leader. If you do, people will not help you. But if you are appointed a leader without you asking for it, you will be helped." So with that, I accepted the position.

Now it has been more than 100 days since you came into power. How has your journey been so far?

My experience in the past 100 days has been extremely good because before this I was just the deputy. The deputy has to accept whatever decision made by our superior or the

menteri besar, in this case. Now I have to evaluate decisions myself. I use the collective approach or through meetings. In the beginning, I made sure that all the programmes we had offered to the people, we discussed in the exco meeting first. We focused on the people's highway, stadium and the people's welfare. These are the programmes which were decided by the exco and accepted by the government. We will go on with it..we will go on with whatever way we can. It's just that in the beginning state, there are issues and it gets postponed, so we talk..that's all. This is the people's hope and all Kelantanese, especially those living outside the state, are really hoping that the plans will come through. When a lot of people told me that the roads were jammed from Kota Baru to Kuala Krai, I went on that road to see it for myself. It took me four full hours to reach Kuala Krai from KB. This made me sad and it is a big challenge to come through for the people and make sure they are not stressed or in trouble. I will discuss it once again so that the building of the highway can be done as soon as possible. We will either do it ourselves with the RM2 million of the people's money which we have collected so far or we will use another way. But actually, it is the federal government's responsibility.

So what is the progress of the project now?

We have called a company to research the problem after the previous company pulled out. What is the cause, we don't know yet. We are waiting for a more detailed research package including the stadium and the roads as well as development in the triangle of Kota Baru, Pengkalan Kubor and Machang.

You have also proposed the setting up of the Institut Pemikiran Tok Guru or IPTG. What is the development of the project?

We started this project on August 1 and we have appointed a director to collect the necessities of his office. We have used funds from the MB's office before it gets its own budget at the end of this year. We will combine this with the Tabung Tok Kenali budget.

What is its purpose?

The people of Kelantan's lives have been synonymous with ulama. Tok Guru Nik Aziz has governed Kelantan for 23 years as an ulama. There are many ulama but not many ulama have dabbled in Islamic movements or in politics. This is a big achievement that we have to preserve. There we have many of Tok Guru's thoughts penned down in the form of poems and writings which should be used as lessons. Although he has left Kota Darul Naim, his administration atmosphere is still alive and his far-sighted ideas in administration, especially in ubudiyah (preservation), mas'uliyah (leadership) dan itqan (sincerity), to me, is really great.

How do you see the role of IPTG in the future?

We want it to be a big foundation in the future. It is going to be the organiser of massive programmes and a driver in administration issues and Islamic ability to govern a state.

What about the other big projects like the affordable housing for poor people that you had announced?

Before this, under the administration of Tok Guru, we did not get any funding from the federal government so we had to be independent. For five years, from 2013 - 2018, we targeted 5,000 houses. We have started the project and we can now hand over 30 units. In the last two to three days, we started on a big project on 155 acres of land belonging to the

Kelantan Islamic Foundation with PKINK and the Menteri besar Corporation (PMBK). In the elite housing, we will build at least 132 units of low-cost houses as well as 600 units of other houses. In Gua Musang, through PMBK, there will be 92 units and more in the pipeline. I am confident that we will reach the target of 5,000 units soon.

Umno has made the issue of clean water in the state as one of their issues. What do you think of that?

The water issue is a national issue. It is easier to make it an issue with the people because of our dependence on water. We are also having a high NRW problem (non-revenue water) because of old pipes which are leaking. We have and are doing the migration to new pipes. However, the issue was brought up again before the elections. The court suit has been revoked. But the government will seriously look into this problem as that is our duty.

Umno always uses the federal government to give allocations and loans for water projects but it has been misused and misappropriated and more. What are your comments?

Yes we do use it well. This is how it is actually, we do not get any money. We get projects from the federal government not as what people thought before. Yes we took loans but we never got any money but only projects. The federal government determines which contractors are to be used for the projects. For example, there was a failed project in Kampung Puteh the other day. I was involved when Ir Haji Fauzi was the Chief Executive Officer of Kelantan Water. We had chosen four contractors for the project but they were rejected and instead, it was given to their own company of choice. As a result, the project failed and we had to open another tender for the project.

This is a sensitive issue which is Datuk Husam Musa, who was elected vice-president of PAS but was not appointed as an exco in the state. Can you explain this?

This is not an issue anymore. I have already given an appropriate answer in the beginning itself. It refers to the laws of setting up a government which is Clause 1 (16). It says that the Sultan has to appoint a state council. For the party, we have no problem. Datuk Husam is our national leader and in the state, he is the deputy commissioner. It just refers to the established laws.

That means that the party and the government have no problems with him. So how about the other posts in the state government?

It is true that the party does not have a problem with him (Datuk Husam). In the state PAS council, we each decided to hold two chairman posts. We offered to put him as chairman in two state-government-linked companies - Kelantan Golden Trade (KGT) Sdn Bhd and Tunjong Development Corporation (TDC). He had chaired both companies before this. We asked the other exco members to handle the rest.

In the 2008 GE and recently, many were of the opinion that the reason PAS won was because of its constituents who lived outside the state, who came back and supported the state government. Do you agree with this?

I see two things here. The first, Kelantan Umno made noise that they got 30 seats. We worked hard. Our people who were outside the state felt responsible in defending the state government. I admit, in the 2008 elections, there were areas with low majorities. For example, Wakaf Baru. We had a tough fight here. In the May 5 polls, our majority increased to 900-plus from just over 200 votes in this seat. We lost six seats and we are looking into

it. So I agree that one of the reasons we won was because of these 'outside voters'. That is why in our exco agenda, we have added them into our portfolio of Islamic development which is headed by Datuk Nasrudin Daud.

The Election Commission (EC) has a plan to make voters vote according to where they live. If this happens, Kelantanese living in Kuala Lumpur, for example, cannot vote in Kelantan anymore. What is your opinion?

We will wait and see. Only thing is, this democracy belongs to the people. It has to be up to the people where they want to vote. So I don't really agree with this proposal.

What about the state's relationship with the federal government?

I follow the constitution in the context of the relationship between the state and the federal government. This right has to be given for the Kelantan people. The rest I leave it to the party to decide from time to time.

What do you think of the proposal to have a unity government between Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim?

This is not my level, this is up to the federal level, the president and the Syura Council, to discuss this. I will just follow.

Lastly, do you have any plans to contest for any posts during the PAS conference (muktamar) this time?

When I think of the work after Tok Guru stepped down, it is a lot. So I never felt the need to contest in anything. But to serve the party and my fight, I am ready but I don't want a post. Because if we go after posts, it will become a burden and a huge responsibility. I already have a lot of work so I have to think twice about it. - August 25, 2013.

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