



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**BARISAN NASIONAL'S BY ELECTION
DEFEAT AT PULAI CHONDONG STATE SEAT
(MACHANG, KELANTAN)**

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STATE SEAT (MACHANG, KELANTAN)**

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**This page is dedicated
to my beloved Parents.**



SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND ITS OBJECTIVES ARE AS FOLLOWS :

- i. To adopt new strategies to recapture the state of Kelantan for Barisan Nasional.*
- ii. To analyse the strength and weakness of the Barisan Nasional.*
- iii. The by-election of the state seat of Pulai Chondong is used as a case study.*

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on research, political memoirs and interviews carried out in Kelantan.

The scope of the study covers the following topics :-

***Chapter 1** introduces the subject matter i.e. Barisan Nasional's defeat at Pulai Chondong by-election. **Chapter 2** talks of Pulai Chondong's background. Constituents woes are in **Chapter 3**. **Chapter 4** talks of the components of the Kelantan power base. Issues leading to Barisan Nasional's defeat is in **Chapter 5**. **Chapter 6** explains how PAS consolidated itself before the election. The analyses of the Barisan Nasional defeat and possible solutions are in **Chapter 7**.*

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

The result of the by-election for the state seat of Pulai Chondong was announced by the returning officer in the late evening on the January 6, 1997.

Yusoff Hamzah, the Barisan candidate lost to Zulkifli Mamat of PAS by 118 votes. The break down of the election result is shown in appendix 1. The Barisan Nasional was shocked that they lost a safe seat which they have taken for granted. "What went wrong?" asked Nordin a senior Umno Kelantan member.

Ahmad a staunch Umno supporter replied, 'But then, for the Kelantanese who are known for their passion to compete the by-election was a match between two prizedly fighters - a rejuvenated Umno and a supposedly crisis-ridden PAS !'

Tan Sri Samad Ismail, a veteran journalist and a former politician, who has followed closely the elections held in the PAS strongholds, was of the opinion that neither religion nor poverty was the crucial factor which enabled PAS to succeed in particular areas. It was PAS' very pragmatic approach which was its real



strength. He said : "It is the difference in style and approach that seems to give the PMIP the ideological strength to maintain its link with the ra'ayat in Kelantan. It is true that religion plays a part in the party's hold over the ra'ayat. But the average Kelantanese is neither a fanatic in his religious outlook nor is he a learned scholar in the teachings of Islam. He is devout but while he may pray five times a day, religion rarely comes into his daily life."

Samad Ismail then gave an illustration of the peculiar mental make-up of the average Kelantanese. According to him,

'If the Kelantanese rejects the offer of the Central Government to build a mosque in his village, it is because the PMIP tells him that it is against his way of life. His way is the *gotong royong*. Building mosques and prayer houses is an occasion in which the whole community participates and the best craftsmanship in the village is to put to use to make it a monument to native ingenuity.

The PMIP identifies itself with the uniqueness of the Kelantanese character and adapts its style to the peculiarities of the Kelantanese situation.



Much of the PMIP's tactics outside of Kelantan do not make sense but they show a grasp of the political moods and feelings of the peasantry. '

"PAS supporters," one keen observer said, "elected welfare officers and not State assemblymen or Parliamentarians into office".

To put it another way, PAS had succeeded hitherto not because of its platform which was still vague. It never attempted, until the early 1980s, to explain its philosophy and objectives in more concrete terms. It was its *modus operandi* which proved most effective, not unlike Dale Carnegie's How To win Friends and Influence People.



CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Pulai Chondong state seat was left vacant with the death of the late Y.B. Kapt (B) Mohamad Noor Ahmad. The election results of Kawasan Dewan Undangan Negeri N.32 Pulai Chondong from 1979 - 1995 are as follows.

1974	ABDULLAH BIN HAJI MOHAMED	BN / UMNO	3,193
1978	ABDULLAH BIN HAJI MOHAMED	BN / UMNO	2,603
1982	ABDULLAH BIN HAJI MOHAMED	BN / UMNO	1,138
1986	ABDULLAH BIN HAJI MOHAMED	BN / UMNO	1,442
1990	KAPT. (B) MOHAMAD NOOR AHMAD	S'46	2,590
1995	KAPT. (B) MOHAMAD NOOR AHMAD	S'46	1,461

The map of Kawasan Pilihanraya Dewan Undangan Negeri N.32 Pulai Chondong is shown in Appendix 1.

Pulai Chondong is typical of a Kelantan constituency where living is a day to day thing and the voters are simple folks, whose numerous kedai kopi are their familiar "assemblies" and parliaments. It is one of those characterless places that would slip out of the visitors mind after hardly a mile away! No interesting buildings mark the landscape. Etched in my mind are the school and the mosque.

But Kelantan backwater is now not only in the limelight but a prize in a contest that is certain to bring in politicians with star ratings from the state as well as from other parts of the country. Barisan is defending this rural seat, while PAS is making a strong bid for it. There is another contender Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia, but it has already been slotted to a distant third place. Already most "assemblies" have decided who is going to be hailed. Either way all the "assemblies" are agreed that the edge would be just around 200 votes.

According to a taxi driver Pak Abu, the voters of Pulai Chondong are divided quite equally between the supporters of the two parties. Whether it is UMNO or PAS that wins, it will be the same story - "a small majority" comments Pak Abu, who occasionally takes passengers from Kota Baru to Pulai Chondong.



In general Pulai Chondong is a beautiful postered place - swaying coconuts trees surrounding kampong houses. Pulai Chondong people are friendly and helpful - still very much the simple people with their charming kampong manners. They are friendly to everyone but to win them over to a cause is another thing. Their concerns are few as they live in harmony with nature. Their major worries are; whether there will be more basic amenities such as schools and clinics; whether the weather will be good for fishing tomorrow.

But these concerns have taken a back seat as they now have another matter to discuss - who will win the Pulai Chondong State seat. It takes their mind off work, off everyday things.

They may be simple people but they are not simple minded. In a way they are sophisticated. They allow themselves to be approached by campaigners, but they do not give away indications of their choices. And outside campaigners are beginning to think that the Pulai Chondong voters are definitely playing hard to get.

Some have made up their minds and would stick to their choices, others have decided but are still keeping an open mind, while yet others are not going to be hurried into making their choice.



Basically, the approaches used by the two main contestants are similar. Both use the personalised approach by visiting each constituent at his home. While this house-to-house campaigning has been used elsewhere, it is perhaps the only way through which the Pulai Chondong voters, with their relaxed attitude to life, can be won over.

One Pulai Chondong farmer who declined to be named, commented that if they were to hold rallies and meetings, no one will bother to attend as they would feel alienated by such styles. *Kuliah* and *kenduri* is more their style.

According to Amar Abdullah, the State Pas deputy chief, who is also handling the campaign for Pas in Pulai Chondong, says the personalised approach would be the most suitable for Pulai Chondong. UMNO has obviously learnt that being overconfident does not help in winning votes and this time Kelantan Umno's Datuk Ahmad Shahibuddin says that they are going to be much more cautious.

UMNO is also cashing in on the fact that Pas' popularity has waned as compared to what it was during the 1990 election when the party won the seat with a 1,000 majority.

Pas' popularity further suffered in the last elections when its majority was even smaller. Kelantan Umno, is obviously excited

by the fact that at last, a part of the typical Kelantan folk such as fisherman and farmers are accepting them. And it is with this hope that Umno is going all out to win the Pulau Chondong seat. This time around Umno wants to make sure that its campaign goes according to plan and that none of its strategies get sidetracked. The whole State Umno election machinery has now moved to Pulau Chondong.

On top of that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Anwar Ibrahim has been chosen by Umno as the chief party luminary who will be campaigning for the party.

For Pas which is going all out as well, it is confident of retaining the seat as it regards Pulau Chondong a party stronghold despite its waning popularity there. Semangat 46 won this seat in the last general election with 1,461 voters majority, and it is hoping that the voters will decide in its favour again.

Pas also gains confidence from the fact that this seat is in Kelantan - the only State which the party rules. Thus, making it an ideal location to contest a by-election.

Also, the party considers the mostly farmer community in Pulau Chondong as Pas' traditional supporters and would work hard to garner their votes.

A casual observation has it that the people in Pulai Chondong have changed little in their attitude towards life in general and governments in particular. One of them phrased it quite well when asked what would be their basis for supporting the candidates.

"Oghre Kelate ni tak kiso la mu parti apo asal kito ni ghaso mu tu oghre kito (The Kelantan people do not really care which party you belong to as long as we feel you are one of us)."

This is the attitude of some of the people and this is what Pas hopes to capitalise on as the party believes that Pas is *oghre kito* (orang kita) to them.

Umno is also trying the *oghre kito* concept by fielding a candidate who will be accepted by the people as one of them. One of them who has made good and has come back to help the people of Pulai Chondong.

Yusoff Hamzah was nominated with the hope that the people might vote for a man whom they think could better their lives materially.

His political connections with the top UMNO bosses might also encourage the Kelantan people to vote him. Pas' candidate

Zulkifli Mamat is also from Pulai Chondong. And while the party is outwardly confident of retaining the seat, it admits that Pulai Chondong is not going to be an easy win. This is a by-election which is still difficult to call. The local political mavens say that it is still 50-50.

CHAPTER 3

CONSTITUENTS WOES

The constituents of Pulai Chondong comprise very humble and simple people. To the outsider, especially the urbanite, there would be plenty to complain about, especially when some of the areas suffer from the Kelantan water crisis. Yet, surprisingly, many of them accept their situation. Yes, there are the usual grouses and dissatisfaction, but that is the extent to it.

However, talks with them show that for them, what comes first is not their role as voters, but their role as Muslims.

□ *Mohamad Rahman 40, businessman,*

The water issue is also on Mohammad's list of problems, "We are at the moment depending on used water as there is no supply from the pipes. We are not even told of why there is such a problem", says Mohammad, who believes that it does not really make a difference to the people of Pulai Chondong as to which party wins the elections as he feels that PAS and BN are the same.

□ *Mas Md Nor, 40's Keropok Maker,*

"It is very difficult for us when the fishermen cannot go out to



sea during the rainy season," says Mas, who makes keropok and sells them at the Kota Baru market about half an hour's drive away. Mas, who is better known as Marikar, and all those involved in the *keropok* cottage industry face many problems during this time as the price of the main ingredient - fish - will go up, sometimes by as much as 100 per cent.

"But the income from selling the *keropok* at the Kota Baru market is enough to feed me and my six children," says Mas. She seems to be resigned to the fact that as the income is enough, there is no need to look for a better life.

She says she has seen State Assemblyman for Chempaka, Nik Aziz or "Tok Guru" as they call him, as he always comes around, but when asked what he has done for the constituency since he was elected, she calls out to her husband to answer, who only sniggered without any reply.

She also brought up the water problem, saying that they are surviving on well water. She says that the situation is so bad that even when there is a trickle from the pipes, it is very murky.

□ *Salih Mamat, 52, businessman,*

"We have all the basic necessities and the needed infrastructure such as schools and clinics. "What we need is an immediate

solution to the erosion problem as it is getting worse every day and the whole village is living in fear of the day when they will fall ill."

Salih says that although they are asking for development, they are not requesting immediate high-rise building such as those in the cities, but slow and properly planned development, as and when the need arises.

□ *Yaakob Abdul Rahman, 58, former headman of Kedai Lalat*
KNOWN as Pak Kub, Yaakob says he has seen many changes in the Pulai Chondong constituency but many have been for the better.

"The opposition is quite strong here now and that goes to show that they have done quite a good job", says Pak Kub who is born and bred in Kedai Lalat.

"The younger generations are also not leaving the place as they find life is good here. Many of them are either subsistence farmers or running their own businesses.

"There are no problems living in Pulai Chondong, as everything is just enough. The State Assemblyman does come around once in a while, just to check out things. The roads are tarred and everything is basically all right," says Pak Kub.

□ *Aisyah Taib, 42, housewife,*

"THERE have been many changes. For example, the roads have been tarred," she says.

"Water is also not much of a problem here as we do get our supply although the pressure is quite low," says Aisyah, a mother of four.

"Although I have stayed in many places, as my husband is in the army, I find that nothing is quite like staying in your own kampung," says Aisyah, who has been staying in Malacca for a quite a number of years.

□ *Hasnah Hassan, 40, farmer,*

"THE Assemblyman does come around to visit us," says Hasnah, when asked whether she has ever seen the Assemblyman.

This mother of 11 children says she has no water problems as she still depends on the well.

"Life is easy if you want it to be so," says Hasnah, who believes that if you are hardworking, there should be nothing to complain about as one will always have food to eat.

"It is only when you are lazy, then you start to complain," says this gutsy woman.

□ *Limah Ali, 60's,*

Living in one of the remotest places of Pulau Chondong, Mak Su, says she has not yet starved, thus life has been good to her.

"The politicians do come around once in a while, just to see their constituents, "says Mak su.

Mak Su does not really care for politicians as she says that if there is anything one needs, one can always ask for help from neighbours.

"Kalau putus nasi, orang boleh pinjam (if there is no rice, people can help)," says Mak Su, who has a piece of land enough to support her family.

CHAPTER 4

COMPONENT OF THE KELANTAN POWER BASE

Before we discuss the issues leading to the Barisan defeat, let us discuss the components of the power base in the state of Kelantan.

The traditional role of the royalty as one of the peoples champion was been eroded with the strengthening of UMNO. The people once gave respect to the Sultan as their spiritual and material leader. The emergence of a new breed of leaders in UMNO who had the power to decide on the welfare of the Malays, shifted the focus from the royalty. The recent constitutional crisis has further dented the power of the Sultan.

The people of Kelantan who loved the Sultan did not take this lightly, this alienated them from the Government and UMNO. The vacuum created suited PAS very well and they filled it well. In some states like Johore, Kedah and Perak the behaviour of the Sultans were also questioned but the people took the opportunity to support the reductions of their powers. PAS had always tried to maintain good relations with the royalty but not out of choice as recent event have shown in Kelantan.



Next the role of the ulamaks or respected holy man was also pivotal in shifting power in Kelantan. The Government had started encouraging the teaching of Islam in most schools and mosques but were not in the position to determine the sphere of influence the ulamaks had over the new educational approach. Interpretation of Islam became crucial to most Muslim scholars and many in Kelantan are very receptive to the PAS approach. Pusat Islam was set up to counter the so-called deviant preachings of other Islamic groups in the country including PAS. It is believed, that many scholars, religious leaders and intellectuals secretly harbour doubts about the industrialisation of Malaysia and the motives of the Government.

The Kelantan leadership under PAS has managed to highlight the need to implement Shariah Laws as a means of abiding to the law of Islam. This has appealed to the common man and during the last election, PAS used this in their manifesto and won. The growing social problems in the country has made PAS's strategy even more appealing to Muslims who want the Shariah laws implemented. UMNO on the other hand has been dragging its feet on this policy which gave more focus on materialism and this was evident in the recent UMNO elections where money politics had reached dangerous levels.



All those components would have to fit into the political framework in Kelantan. PAS wants to establish a strong government based on the tenets of Islam and its scriptures. The law of God has been enshrined in the Quran and man will prosper by abiding, if wealth is to be shared and development do not necessarily bring prosperity. Spiritual strength together with the law of God will guide every man in his daily life. Materialism has no place in society but survival of the living being is important. The Shariah laws must be a form of deterrent to the man who sins.

On the other hand, there is the Semangat 46 which is viewed as a party without any direction but with some support in Kelantan especially from the royalty. The leader of this party Tengku Razaleigh himself a royalty saw his power and influence eroded in his homestate. This breakway faction from UMNO saw a need to preserve the old traditions in UMNO without the word dictator, cliques and corruption being condoned in the party. Their own instability and lack of wide support gave more clout for PAS's ideology which had been consistent.

PAS should be credited for formulating a strategic approach their key success factor lies with their leadership. Haji N. K. Aziz has been a shrewd leader ever to be seen. His age, personality, and overall behavioral approaches has given him a great advantage

