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Pulai Chondong (News Analysis)

BN, PAS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY IN PULAI CHONDONG

By: Ali Mamat

MACHANG, Jan 3 (Bernama) -- With three more days for polling in the Pulai Chondong state by-election in Kelantan both the Barisan Nasional and PAS are quietly confident of victory.

The by-election which is a straight fight between the BN's Yusoff Hamzah and PAS' Zulkefli Mamat, is being held following the death of the assemblyman for the area Captain (Rtd) Mohd Nor Ahmad on Dec 4.

Observers attribute the BN confidence to the increasing support shown for its candidate lately by the constituents particularly former Parti Melayu Semangat 46 members even though in the early stages their stand was divided.

S46 was dissolved in October last year and following this close to 200,000 of its members applied to join Umno.

Pulai Chondong has 12,635 registered voters. In the general election of 1990, the late Mohd Nor who contested on an S46 ticket defeated the BN's Abdullah Haji Mohamad with a 2,590-vote majority.

In the general election of 1995, the late Mohd Mor who again contested on an S46 ticket beat BN candidate Ahmad Shukri Hassan. However the victory margin went down to 1,461 votes.

During the two general elections, the S46 was still together with PAS, Berjasa and Hamim in a loose coalition known as Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah. The S46 left the Angkatan following its dispute with PAS in the middle of last year.

Observers feel that the solid support from Yusoff's family will ensure his victory on Monday.

Yusoff's father, Haji Hamzah Abdul Rahman, is a founder member of PAS Machang and is still a member of a PAS branch in the district.

At a recent news conference, Hamzah said he would always be with PAS but nevertheless would be a happy father if the BN candidate won because he was after all his son.

Hamzah also said he would be happy if the PAS candidate won because it was the party he supported.

Many political analysts here believe that the statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that "it is not easy for the BN to win" in Pulai Chondong was more of a reminder to the BN campaign not to be too confident and complacent.

When he was in Kuala Terengganu two days ago, Dr Mahathir who is also Umno President, urged the BN campaign to concentrate fully on the by-election to ensure Yusoff's victory.

This follows the media observation that Kelantan Umno Deputy Liaison Chairman Datuk Haji Annuar Musa was a lone ranger in the campaign trail with none of the top BN guns around.

Following this, Pulai Chondong had since yesterday become a hive of activity with a flood of BN leaders in the constituency including Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. Razaleigh last visited Pulai Chondong a day after nomination day on Dec 26.

BN is also banking on its past record whereby Pulai Chondong, before the emergence of the S46, had always been a BN stronghold. Since independence the constituency had only fallen once to PAS -- in the general election of 1959.

PAS believes that victory was at hand as it feels the issues which it raised through its speakers had succeeded in convincing the people to vote

BN.

One of the issues was the arrest of Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib in Australia for allegedly not declaring to customs currency notes to the value of RM2.4 million which he was carrying when leaving that country on Dec 22.

Even though Muhammad had explained that the money did not belong to him, PAS was confident that the Pulai Chondong voters would not be easily won over.

PAS also feels that it had succeeded in casting doubts among former S46 members about their future in Umno when some of their membership applications were turned down.

Some observers feel that the explanation from Umno Secretary-General Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik recently about the position of former S46 members who had not been accepted as Umno members had not convinced former S46 members who were voters in Pulai Chondong.

Sabbaruddin had said the applications were rejected because of technical errors when filling the forms or the applicants were underage.

PAS had placed its victory chances on the leadership of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat who had calmly faced various problems facing his administration.

The issues had been fully exploited by the BN during the campaign to paint a picture that the PAS administration had gone haywire.

Political observers feel the outcome will be decided by the ability of the BN and PAS campaigns to convince the voters in the final days before polling.

According to them, on paper the BN had a better chance of winning. However PAS also has a strong election machinery and its own strategies to turn the tables on the BN.

If the BN plays its cards well, it is not impossible for PAS, which is already preparing victory kenduris, to just win the applause but lose the battle. -- BERNAMA

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