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Ku Li's fervent supporters

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JUST about the only people who support the former leaders of the now defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) are the Orang Asli community in Gua Musang, said one disgruntled Kelantan voter.

While this may sound like a harsh assessment, it does have some credence considering the widespread disgust at the party's decision to join Umno.

The support for "Ku Li", as Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah is known, was however apparent at Kampung Cengkelik, Kuala Betis (more than an hour's journey from Gua Musang) where Tengku Razaleigh recently held a meeting with the Orang Asli.

Ever optimistic, the former S46 president was a model politician, sitting stoically through five speeches on a muggy May afternoon in the village balai raya.

When his turn came to speak, he told the 150-strong audience of how important it was for the Barisan Nasional to wrest control of Kelantan so that projects can proceed and not be hampered by Federal-State bickering.

He said the Kelantan Orang Asli had been shortchanged because the Kijang Mas co-operative, originally launched for the benefit of the Orang Asli in the State, had been "hijacked" by the Orang Asli Affairs Department. It was now serving the collective needs of the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, using money originally earned from the exploitation of the State's resources.

Tengku Razaleigh encouraged the Orang Asli to get access to the RM6 million allocated to the Kijang Mas co-operative.

He said there was a proposal to invest the money but this would be inadvisable because there was no guarantee of profits. In fact, he cautioned, it would be very risky to use these funds for investment.

Emphasising that he understood their concerns over land ownership, he said he supported the Orang Asli in their efforts to acquire individual titles in the resettlement scheme they now farmed.

Noting that efforts to build roads in the villages were stymied by the State Government even though federal funds were now available, Tengku Razaleigh said Gua Musang was facing a new predicament. Where previously State projects were not supported by Federal decision-makers; with Semangat 46 joining Umno, the constituency was now an "opposition" area in Pas-controlled Kelantan.

Tengku Razaleigh also touched on the former S46 party's relations with Pas and Umno. He said when Pas members found out he had met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to discuss a possible S46 disbandment, some had reacted with anger, as if he had met with a Pharaoh (marah seperti jumpa dengan Firaun).

Yet, he said, he had never kissed Dr Mahathir's hand (ambo tak cium tangan Dr Mahathir dia pula cium tangan), referring to the Kelantan Menteri Besar's welcome to Dr Mahathir when the latter last visited Kelantan.

As speeches go, it certainly was a virtuoso performance, well timed and expertly executed.

It cannot be denied that among the Orang Asli community, support for Tengku Razaleigh runs high. In fact, one Orang Asli representative said the community was behind him to the extent that if he climbed a mountain, they would follow and if he jumped into the river, they would follow too.

Muhammad Yunus Chu, a 71-year-old Orang Asli leader, voiced his support

for Tengku Razaleigh, as did many others.

In Gua Musang, Tengku Razaleigh is credited for bringing development, and is seen as the driving force behind the Kuala Krai-Gua Musang highway.

For their afternoon with him, the Kampung Cengkelik villagers received an allocation for sports and recreation. They were told that this was the beginning, and efforts would be made to obtain more funds.

The amount they require would stretch even the most generous of MPs. The Orang Asli of Kuala Betis desperately need a better road costing an estimated RM800,000 and 24-hour electricity supply pegged at RM160,000. To get individual titles, the plots would have to be surveyed and demarcated, at a cost each Orang Asli family can ill afford.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia lecturer Hasan Mat Nor, who has done several studies on the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, said giving individual titles to the Orang Asli of Gua Musang would be a good move provided the lots are given to those with the capability to work on them. If not, these lots would change hands and fall to the richer members of the community.

If the redistribution involves areas within the existing RPS (group resettlement schemes), allocating individual lots would not cause problems because the land is already being farmed by the Orang Asli themselves, he said.

Gua Musang is also a special case. Initially, Hasan said, several poor Malay families were resettled together with the Orang Asli and their position in any negotiation over land would have to be sorted out.

South Kelantan Regional Development Authority (Kesedar) deputy chairman Datuk Rozali Isohak said the agency was going to institute a special development programme for the Orang Asli of Gua Musang.

On Tengku Razaleigh's plans for the advancement of the Orang Asli community in Gua Musang, Rozali said he would propose that Orang Asli community leaders meet with Kesedar to thrash out development issues.

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