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Election-Kedah (Analysis)

BN MUST LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE OF KEDAH

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ALOR SETAR, Nov 30 (Bernama) -- Although the Kedah Barisan Nasional (BN) was again given the mandate to rule the state, it should not regard its showing in winning 24 out of the 36 state seats in yesterday's general election as a total success.

Political observers said the state government should listen to the people whose votes clearly showed that something is not quite right this time.

Where the BN went wrong, resulting in it losing 12 state and eight parliamentary seats is still a question mark.

Previously no one had ever thought that the BN would lose this badly, its poorest showing since independence.

PAS' best record was in 1969 when it won eight state and three parliamentary seats.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, in a news conference this morning, said Kedah was lucky as the BN had managed to retain control of the state despite predictions that Kedah would fall to the opposition.

Political observers feel that Sanusi was only making excuses to pacify himself and his supporters.

Several factors can be attributed to the BN's poor showing, including choice of candidates, the crisis within the Kedah Umno that had yet to be resolved and the mega projects that do not benefit the people.

The wrong choice of candidates contributed to the BN's downfall in areas like the Padang Terap, Jelun, Pokok Sena and Baling parliamentary constituencies.

Dropping Padang Terap Umno chief Dr Affifudin Haji Omar from contesting the Padang Terap parliamentary seat gave the best opening to PAS.

According to an Umno Youth member who declined to be named, PAS had never won in Padang Terap and even its former president Datuk Mohamed Asri Muda had lost badly to Umno there.

But now, because of the crisis within Umno, many Umno supporters and fence-sitters who were confused and had lost confidence in Umno, had voted for PAS.

Kubang Pasu witnessed the Umno supporters protesting when former menteri besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff was not selected to contest the Jitra state seat.

It cannot be denied that Osman still has strong influence in the constituency although some people try to dismiss it.

The drop by more than 7,000 votes in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad majority win in Kubang Pasu to a certain extent is linked to this development.

The BN's defeat in Jerlun, Kuala Kedah and Yan can be linked to several local issues including the tiger prawn breeding project in Kerpan which has yet to bring yield to the residents and the proposed coastal reclamation project which covers 100km from Kuala Jerlun to Kuala Muda.

An observer said the residents concerned, especially the coastal fishermen, were probably peeved with the state government, particularly Sanusi, for not listening to their problems and instead being more interested to voice his own ideas.

"The people are fed up with Sanusi's ideas. Once in a while they they also want an opportunity to be heard," he said.

Meanwhile, in Baling, Sik and Pendang, victories had been predicted for

PAS because the BN had won these seats with slim majorities in the 1995 election.

In Sik there was also opposition to the Beris dam project planned by the BN government and although the problem is said to be resolved, there is still dissatisfaction over the treatment of the locals, especially over relocation and compensation.

Political observers said that PAS, realising this, had made preparations years ago to wrest these seats.

Umno, on the other hand, appeared to be unprepared and over-confident and this, coupled with the sacking of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, gave PAS the opportunity to make inroads in the state, they said.

To prevent Kedah from becoming the third state to fall to PAS, the other two being Kelantan and Terengganu, Umno must conduct a post mortem now to identify its weaknesses.

-- BERNAMA

HT/MFJ JK