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It's uphill for Pas in BN fortress

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PAS is mounting an offensive to wrest control of Umno strongholds in Kedah, but this certainly will not be an easy task.

However, State Umno leaders, though confident, are not complacent.

They are working hard to deny Pas any inroads into their stronghold because they are aware that Kedah is one of the four States in which the Opposition is going all-out for victory.

Pas is expected to make issues out of what the party think will influence voters. Whether or not the voters can be swayed to its side remains to be seen.

In question are constituencies such as Bukit Raya, a Pas stronghold in the Pendang parliamentary constituency now held by Pas President Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor and Kubang Pasu, the seat now held by Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Fadzil, who is also Kedah Pas Commissioner, is just too strong there, Pas said. By the same token, Pas will be mistaken in thinking they can win in Kubang Pasu, Dr Mahathir's constituency.

A close aide to Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, admitting that Bukit Raya is Fadzil's stronghold, said that the Umno machinery "is working and we are working very, very hard to win".

In fact, he said, Sala (the other state seat held by Pas) could already be considered Umno's.

Fadzil is making another bid for the Pendang parliamentary seat, now held by Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Othman Abdul.

Othman has been holding the seat since the 1990 general election but given Pas' view that the "situation is different now", the party expects a victory.

Not that easy, said an Umno insider because the situation now was not all that different.

Issues raised by Pas about the State administration, the call for change and claims of a diminishing support for Umno are nothing more than a reflection of the Opposition's own fear.

On Mahfuz Omar, the Pas Youth Chief, Sanusi has this to say - that he is baring his fangs because he has something to prove.

"It is just like people going to the circus to watch the clown... They will not vote for the clown," he said.

Sanusi said Pas had not been able to woo the fence-sitters or make inroads into BN strongholds, including his own Kuah State seat in Langkawi or in Kubang Pasu, which Dr Mahathir has held since 1974.

But Pas believes it is drawing growing crowd support at its ceramahs in Kubang Pasu, which regularly featured personalities such as Harun Din and Parti Keadilan Nasional president Datin Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

But the size of gatherings, as has been shown, does not necessarily translate into votes.

Umno Information Chief Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin, who is also Kedah BN secretary, said: "The presence of thousands of people at Pas ceramahs does not reflect anything as voters are mature enough to know that only BN can deliver and rule Kedah effectively."

During the 1995 general election, the crowds often seemed bigger at ceramahs held by the opposition. But the BN won in these very constituencies.

For Sanusi it boils down to contribution and a good track record.

"It is easy to find other people's faults... Pas has done nothing for the people. Even youth clubs in the State have done more for the people compared to Pas, whose leaders only know how to talk."

Kedah MCA liaison committee chief Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the Chinese were aware of the BN's good track record in delivering what the Chinese community wanted, and it would continue to support BN.

State MIC chairman Datuk V. Saravanan said the Indian community's support for the BN was undivided despite attempts by Keadilan to "infiltrate" their ranks.

There are "grey areas" where the BN won with a majority of less than 2,000 in the last general election.

These are Kuala Nerang (17-vote majority), Kupang (393), Belantek (428), Langgar (432), Anak Bukit (568), Pedu (1,047), Jeneri (1,061), Ayer Hitam (1,717), Pengkalan Kundor (1,485) and Bukit Lada (1,988).

The parliamentary seats the Opposition is targeting are Padang Terap, Kuala Kedah, Penang, Sik, Baling, Langkawi, Jerlun and Pokok Sena.

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