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Keadilan may be limited to ex-S46 seats

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Parti Keadilan Nasional, with little leverage and organisational strength, may have to be content with seats contested by Parti Melayu Semangat 46 in the last two general elections, observers said.

Often, these are constituencies where the Opposition has little chance of winning. The situation stems from the fact that both Pas and DAP are unlikely to budge from their traditional seats.

This is especially true in seats where Pas and DAP lost narrowly in 1995. Examples are the Kedah state seats of Kuala Nerang (BN majority of 17) and Kupang (393).

The situation is more hazy in Kelantan where Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a leading opposition figure in 1990 and 1995, is back as State Umno chief.

Elsewhere, observers said there was also no guarantee that Pas would let Keadilan contest all S46 seats.

"A normal tactic is to flood an area with Pas flags and declare that to be its stronghold. It happened to us in 1990," said a supreme council member in the now defunct S46.

Political observers said the very fact that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had inspired the launch of Keadilan but did not become a member, was a reflection of the party's prospects.

Which means the rumour that Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar, a close aide of Anwar, is about to join Pas instead of Keadilan may not be a surprise after all.

In the seat allocation, generally, Pas' dominance over its junior partner, Keadilan, will be most obvious in the Malay belt states.

In Perlis, Pas feels it is on the ascendancy after the Arau by-election victory. The notable Keadilan candidate is likely to be its secretary-general Anuar Tahir for the parliamentary constituency of Padang Besar.

The incumbent is Deputy Home Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid who defeated Pas' Hisharuddin Hassan with a majority of 10,070 in 1995.

Proving Keadilan's worthiness to Pas, is in itself, a major concern, sources said. There are three parliamentary and 15 State seats in Perlis.

In Kedah, insiders said there was an understanding that no party would "disturb" each other's traditional seats.

Which means that Keadilan, as in Perlis, will take over S46 seats. In 1995, S46 contested seven parliamentary and five state seats but did not win any.

In fact, Pas leaders said the party which now has two state seats - Bukit Raya and Sala - may also contest in areas which featured S46 candidates in 1995, given "the increasing support by the constituents to Pas".

"But this will be with the consent of the other parties in the front," said a Pas official.

Despite a lot of talk about Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail challenging Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kubang Pasu, Keadilan has yet to decide on the candidacy.

State Keadilan secretary Abdul Rahman Ahmad said Pas had indicated that Kubang Pasu would be given to Keadilan.

"We have not decided on the candidate ... we may put an unknown figure to contest against Dr Mahathir if Wan Azizah is not contesting," he said. Dr Mahathir has been its MP since 1974.

In private, Keadilan officials said they knew the party could not win Kubang Pasu.

At a ceramah in Kampung Sungai Durian in Pokok Sena last night, Pas youth chief Mahfuz Omar claimed that Kedah is showing "similar signs of defeat" as Kelantan in 1990.

Inspired by the presence of a three-member British Broadcasting Corporation crew who recorded part of speeches made by Mahfuz and Keadilan leaders Tian Chua and Saifuddin Nasution, a local, the crowd, including local Chinese cheered.

In Malacca, State Keadilan deputy chairman, Khalid Jaafar, asserted that there were intimate ties among opposition parties which were are represented in opposition ceramah.

Asked whether there were difficulties in seat allocation, Khalid, Anwar's former press secretary said: "I have put up the flags of Pas, DAP, Keadilan and PRM at my house."

Based on the personal experience of a former S46 supreme council member, however, it was normal for S46 speakers to be restricted to a short speech at the opposition ceramah.

"As we are picking up steam, we will get a note so that we stop. Then the Pas representative will speak for one hour," he said.

In Ipoh, Keadilan's Ipoh Barat branch today called for the dissolution of DAP, PRM and Pas and for their members to be absorbed into Keadilan.

It suggested that DAP national chairman Dr Chen Man Hin become the deputy chairman of Keadilan and DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang become Keadilan's deputy secretary.

Branch legal adviser and former State DAP deputy chairman, Mohamed Asri Othman, said in a statement today the three parties could contest under the Keadilan symbol in the general election.

This, he said, would overcome the problem of migration of members or the tussle over seat allocation.

He said the DAP had tried to contest in all 48 parliamentary seats previously and was now facing a major crisis within the party.

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