

28 NOV 1999

Election-Kedah

OPPOSITION PARTIES SEEK WIND OF CHANGE IN KEDAH

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ALOR SETAR, Nov 28 (Bernama) -- As in previous general elections, Kedah is once again the focus of opposition parties, especially PAS which appears to be influential in the interior areas.

Hoping for a wind of change in the state, PAS has been trying to draw support by accusing Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders of misappropriation and power abuse.

"PAS has support in Kedah, especially in the interior areas. But the fact is that today's voters are intelligent. They are able to assess which is diamond and which is glass," said a political observer.

The election fever is felt very much although both the BN and the opposition parties are not holding that many ceramahs. Instead, both sides seem to prefer house-to-house campaigns.

In 1995, BN won all 15 parliamentary seats and 34 of the 36 state seats in the state while PAS secured two state seats -- Sala and Bukit Raya.

This year, a total of 75 candidates are contesting for state seats and 30 for parliamentary seats.

BN has fielded contestants in all 36 state seats, PAS in 32 and DAP four.

As for parliamentary constituencies, BN is contesting all 16, PAS 10, Keadilan four and DAP one.

Three independents have also joined the fray -- two in Lunas and one in Bukit Selambau, both state seats.

BN has fielded 19 new faces this time. Among those dropped is former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff in the Jitra constituency. He is replaced by Prof Datuk Dr Othman Ishak, former rector of Insaniah, an Islamic higher learning institute in the state.

Political watchers said the BN's move to drop some of the incumbents caused some dissatisfaction among their supporters initially but not anymore, and it should not affect the winning chances of the candidates.

For the BN, four state seats -- Bukit Raya, Sala, Kupang dan Anak Bukit -- and the parliamentary constituency of Baling are regarded as black areas.

Grey areas include the Kuala Nerang, Langgar, Bayu, Jeneri, Sungai Tiang, Kubang Rotan and Kuah state seats and the Padang Terap, Pendang and Kuala Kedah parliamentary seats.

The remaining 25 state and 11 parliamentary seats are regarded as white areas.

They include the Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is defending. He is not expected to face much of a problem in warding off the challenge put up by PAS candidate Subky Latiff.

In 1995, Dr Mahathir secured 24,495 areas to defeat PAS' Ahmad Mohd Alim with a majority of 17,226 votes.

Political watchers said that among the factors that might influence the voting pattern this time were choice of candidacy, current issues and the popularity level of Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

A keen contest is expected in the Anak Bukit state constituency between PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor and senior state executive councillor Datuk Abdullah Hasnan Kamaruddin, who won the seat in 1995 with a slim majority of 568 votes.

PAS could erase that majority this time as the party has strong support

in the area, more so with Fadzil as the candidate.

As for Bukit Raya and Sala, it will not be easy for the BN to wrest the two state seats from PAS.

"Both belong to PAS. Irrespective of who you field it will go to PAS," said an observer.

That may be the reason why Fadzil moved to Anak Bukit, leaving Bukit Raya to be contested by Mohamed Taulan Rasul, former legal adviser of the Kota Setar Municipal Council. He will face BN's Abdullah Bahari, the Pendang Umno Youth chief.

The spotlight will also be in Baling where the BN candidate, Bahadur Shah Mat, former political secretary of Sanusi when he was the federal agriculture minister, faces PAS' Taib Azamuddin Mohamed Taib, former imam of the National Mosque.

Although he is a local, Bahadur rarely returns to Baling whereas Taib Azamuddin, who is also a local, is more popular due to his moderate stand and the posts he had held in the interior areas.

Observers, however, feel that Dr Mahathir's presence in Kubang Pasu and his visits to "problem areas" in the 24 hours before polling day would change the trend of voting

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