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Election-Kedah (News Analysis)

LET'S VISIT KEDAH VERSUS LET'S TAKE OVER KEDAH

By: Jamaluddin Muhammad

ALOR SETAR, July 14 (Bernama) -- The following sets of three little words are separate battle cry.

"Jom Pi Kedah" (let's visit Kedah) is a state government gimmick for wooing tourists and "Jom Tawan Kedah" (let's conquer Kedah), which has a political tone, is for unseating the state government.

As election fever grips the nation, PAS is seeing to it that the opposition party's chorus of "Jom Tawan Kedah" drowns the first battle cry.

To secure a simple majority to form the next Kedah state government, PAS will have to win 19 of the 36 seats in the State Legislative Assembly.

In the incumbent legislature, PAS has only two seats namely Bukit Raya represented by party president Datuk Fadzil Noor and Sala, by Azizan Abdul Razak.

PAS has long been yearning, at least for the past decade, of ruling four peninsular states -- Perlis, Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan.

So far it has realised "a quarter of that dream" when it won Kelantan in 1990 and retained it in the following general election five years later.

Will Kedah fall to PAS the next time around?

Or arithmetically speaking, can PAS win 17 more additional seats to earn a simple majority in the coming election provided they retain Bukit Raya and Sala as well.

Political observers have this to say.

Even if the general election were to be held tomorrow, PAS faces an uphill task to win and form the next state government, let alone with a simple majority at that.

But, said the observers, there is no denying that PAS will put a strong and all-out fight against the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in seven state seats in Kedah.

They are Kuala Nerang, Kupang, Belantek, Langgar, Anak Bukit, Pedu and Jeneri.

Conquering Kupang, Anak Bukit and Pedu will lend significance to unseating the state government since these seats are currently being held by Kedah state executive councillors.

Political observers said PAS' narrow defeat in the seven seats in the 1995 general election, including losing in Kuala Nerang by 11 votes and Kupang by 393, gives it an even chance to swing the votes in its favour the next time around.

As for the other five seats it narrowly lost in 1995, PAS was defeated in Belantek by 428 votes, Langgar (432) Anak Bukit (568), Pedu (1,047) and Jeneri (1,061).

On the same premise, the observers argued, the BN too can swing the votes and wrest away Sala since the PAS assemblyman Azizan had won the seat with only a 196-vote majority in the last general election.

PAS has been chanting the "Jom Tawan Kedah" mantra since last year but this gets louder with the advent of nomination and polling days.

Of late, virtually every week now, "Jom Tawan Kedah" has been the signature slogan at PAS political talks.

At times Fadzil's opposite number in one of its opposition alliance partners, Parti Keadilan's chief Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail also attended these rallies.

It will be naive indeed to assume that PAS is only interested in the state seats in Kedah.

PAS has in fact been eyeing in particular the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency currently held by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is Umno president and BN chairman.

To show it meant business in wanting to gain control of the seat, PAS had even conveniently and comically removed the last vowel in Pasu and declared Kubang Pasu as Kubang Pas.

(Kubang is literally a bog where buffaloes enjoy their mudbath).

PAS reckoned that come nomination day who else would be conveniently suited to take on Dr Mahathir in Kubang Pasu other than Dr Wan Azizah, wife of jailed former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, herself.

"If Kubang Pasu folk want me to contest here ... why not," Wan Azizah said at one of the PAS-organised ceramahs in Kubang Pasu, hinting about her willingness to take on Dr Mahathir.

Fadzil had reportedly pledged PAS support for Dr Wan Azizah should she decide to stand in Kubang Pasu and that his party would even make it easier for her by not fielding a PAS candidate there at all.

Last month Keadilan set up a state liaison committee for Kedah, perhaps underlining its desire to join in the fray in earnest.

There is much anxiety and curiosity now whether Dr Wan Azizah can unseat Dr Mahathir who has represented Kubang Pasu since 1974 and had each time won by a majority of about 20,000 votes in past general elections.

Kubang Pasu aside, PAS is also said to be eyeing the Sik, Pendang and Padang Terap parliamentary seats.

(The MP for Sik is Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Hamid Othman, Pendang, the Parliamentary Secretary of the PM's Department Datuk Othman Abdul and Padang Terap, Deputy Human Resources Minister Dr Affifuddin Omar).

One who regularly attends PAS political ceramahs will soon get familiar with the issues harped on namely allegations of power abuse, waste of public money, corruption and criticisms at the government's handling of the economic and financial crises.

So far not much had been said about Anwar at these PAS ceramahs.

BN ceramahs, on the other hand, centred on issues of preserving unity, protecting national sovereignty from outsiders, the government's successful formula for economic recovery and of rebuttals of PAS' allegations.

PAS is expected to intensify campaigning in Kedah this week, especially to counter the anticipated overwhelming response reserved for Dr Mahathir who is scheduled to visit his birth state this weekend.

If at all, there is a need for more little words to encapsulate the action in Kedah right now, then they can very well be "Kedah is hot, baby!".

-- BERNAMA

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