

15/05/2000

BN set to retain Teluk Kemang seat

R. Sittamparam

TELUK Kemang, famous for its white sandy beaches and holiday resorts will be the cynosure of the nation come June 10 when a parliamentary by-election is held following the death of its MP, S.A. Anpalagan on April 28.

The resort town, a favourite weekend holiday spot in Negri Sembilan with more than 20,000 tourists converging on it every week, is expected to be busier than usual from May 30, nomination day for the by-election.

The election atmosphere and campaigning here is not expected to be as intense as at the Sanggang State by-election in Pahang on April 1. That is because the Teluk Kemang parliamentary constituency does not have any serious issues for opposition parties to harpon.

The 18-kilometre stretch of beach overlooking the Straits of Malacca at Teluk Kemang borders either fully or partly the State constituencies of Lukut, Si Rusa and the Malacca-Negri Sembilan border tract of Pasir Panjang.

The other two State constituencies in the area are Linggi and Chembong located between the Port Dickson and Rembau districts. Agriculture is the principal occupation, with oil palm and rubber plantations and vegetable farms dominating.

Many of the people in Teluk Kemang are employed at the Shell and Esso refineries and the Tuanku Jaafar power station, between Lukut and Si Rusa. The 29 hotels and resorts in the Port Dickson town area and Pasir Panjang also offer employment to many.

For the 66,646 voters in the Teluk Kemang parliamentary constituency the by-election is expected to be a re-affirmation of their faith in the Barisan Nasional Government.

The constituency is seen as a BN stronghold although the seat and all five State seats within it were lost by the Alliance to the DAP in 1969.

When the BN reclaimed the constituency in 1974 its representatives did not waste any time in securing the full support of their constituents.

According to Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad, who is the Linggi State Assemblyman, the people have few complaints as the State BN which he heads, has served the people well.

"I have met with the Teluk Kemang Umno, MCA and MIC division and branch leaders and the people of the constituency as part of the BN preparations for the by-election, and I am assured the people are behind us.

"The people know what the BN has done for them from 1974 compared with what they got from the DAP between 1969 and 1974."

Mohamad Isa said whatever little was left to be done for the people there, will be delivered before or after the June 10 elections.

Although last year's viral encephalitis outbreak at Lukut somewhat disrupted the tranquility of the constituency - robbing 800 pig farmers of their livelihoods and undermining the tourist industry, the main economic activity of the area - its serenity has now been restored.

Tourists, both local and foreign, are flocking back. The pig farming community at Bukit Pelanduk in Lukut is now slowly moving to other economic activities.

Lukut State Assemblyman Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam said the pig farmers and their workers were now employed at factories, newly set up in the area, with others turning to farming, fish and frog rearing, and coastal fishing.

He said some of the farmers who had bought lots at the modern Integrated Pig Farming Area at Tanah Merah in his constituency, were awaiting the decision of the Veterinary Services Department on the opening of the facility.

Despite harping on several issues including the payment of compensation to pig farmers affected by the VE, the Opposition failed to make a dent in the area in the last general election.

The VE outbreak was solved when about 700,000 pigs affected by the virus, from farms in the Lukut area were destroyed under the Government's VE operation.

More than 80 people died of VE which included a new strand of the virus, the Nipah, in the three months of the outbreak.

It was only last month that the disease was completely wiped out from the area.

The issue of government compensation payable to farmers affected by the outbreak was politicised by the DAP at Lukut which has a 65.69 per cent Chinese voter majority.

The DAP harped on this issue and tried to turn the devastated pig farmers against the Government.

However, the MCA promptly came to the aid of the pig farmers, collecting millions of ringgit under a nationwide VE donation drive to assist the victims.

The Government which had worked against time to stop the VE disaster, using the combined resources of all its related departments and agencies, also came forward to offer compensation, to cover some of the pig farmers' losses.

In initial payments made to the affected farmers the Government paid RM50 for each pig destroyed during the operation.

Recently, it decided to pay another RM70 per pig to the farmers and in the latest announcement last week, it was agreed that all outstanding compensations to the farmers be settled before May 30.

With Malays forming the majority of voters in the area, particularly at Chembong, with 74.26 per cent Malays, Linggi (61.32 per cent) and Pasir Panjang (73.06 per cent), Pas also campaigned extensively in the constituency, with weekly ceramahs during the run-up to the 1999 general election.

According to the racial breakdown of the electorate for Teluk Kemang, there are 30,262 Malays (45.44 per cent), 22,144 Chinese (33.23 per cent), 13,755 Indians (20.64) and 465 (0.70) other races.

However, the voters flatly rejected the Opposition, with BN winning all the five State and Teluk Kemang parliamentary seats in the general election. (The State BN also scored a historic 100 per cent win at the seven Parliamentary and 32 State seats in the 1999 General elections.)

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, who emphasised that he would be picking a candidate of similar capabilities as the late Anpalagan - young, energetic and dedicated - announced last week that he had already made a choice for the candidate.

Bending to the wishes of the State MIC and the Teluk Kemang constituents Samy Vellu, who is also Works Minister, stated that the candidate that he had picked was born in Negri Sembilan.

He said that the name and particulars of the candidate had been handed over to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for approval adding that Mohamad Isa would announce the name after the Umno general assembly.

Meanwhile, the DAP has stated that it will be fielding its own candidate for the Teluk Kemang seat in the by-election, although last year the candidate fielded was Parti Keadilan Nasional's N. Gopalakrishnan. DAP's decision is being disputed by Keadilan.

The two parties are now locked in a tussle for the seat with talks between them under way to resolve the matter.

Meanwhile, it is learnt that the DAP's list of five possible candidates include former Jelutong MP Karpal Singh, former Teluk Intan MP M. Kulasegaran, K. Sarojadevi from Negri Sembilan DAP and party vice chairman, former unionist Ahmad Nor.

DAP adviser and former chairman Dr Chen Man Hin maintained that the seat belonged to DAP and that the party would field its own candidate there.

He added that the DAP candidate would, however, go in as an underdog in the by-election as it would be tough to recapture the seat from the BN.

He said there were, however, many issues in the area, including irregularities in the payment of compensation to the VE-hit pig farmers, poverty at plantations and the many unfulfilled promises made by the BN to voters.

Dr Chen said the DAP which he believed would be fielding either an Indian or a Malay candidate, still had a fighting chance of winning the seat.