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By-elections will bring twists and turns of Malay politics to the

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ON the outset, the impending by-elections in Pendang and Anak Bukit should be based on love and less of hate.

This is especially true for the Malays who went through almost four years of politics of hate which culminated in the 1999 general election and subsequent by-elections.

The by-elections in Pendang and Anak Bukit should actually see both Umno and Pas trying to appeal to the more benign sentiments of the voters.

For Umno, it is an opportunity for these voters to show their love to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whose announcement to quit two weeks ago shocked the nation.

As it is, Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had said it out loud that he was sure the people of Pendang and Anak Bukit were as stunned as the rest of the nation of news that Dr Mahathir was resigning.

To him, the people in both constituencies can translate their love and support for Dr Mahathir by voting for the Barisan Nasional/Umno candidates.

Given the fact that both seats are in Kedah and Dr Mahathir is from the State, it is surely not difficult for the voters to express such sentiments.

But it is not as simple for Umno.

The State and Parliamentary seats were previously held by the late Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor, a much respected leader in Kedah.

To make Umno's task more difficult, Pas is expected to field Fadzil's son and the sentiments for the late party president can very well swing the votes in favour of Pas.

A little further, while Umno may hope voters will be sentimental enough to vote for their candidates based on their feelings towards Dr Mahathir, Pas can be expected to try to negate such emotions.

As it is, Pas speakers have already started attacking Dr Mahathir and his plans to pass on the mantle to his successor.

For Pas, these seats are "liberated" territories, which means they were placed in the hands of Muslim "rulers" and should not be allowed to fall back to lesser Muslims or those deemed to be infidels.

Furthermore, the fact that these seats belong to their late party president, the need to defend and retain them becomes more pressing.

Defeat for Pas in these seats may prove that its hopes of taking Kedah in the next general election are merely pipe dreams.

All these aside, the by-elections should show whether Umno had regained some of its lost footing within the Malay electorate since the 1999 general election.

All by-elections since 1999, from Sanggang to Ketari, were in constituencies won by BN in the last general election.

Pendang and Anak Bukit will be the first contest for BN in opposition held areas.

They are both Malay majority constituencies and should be a good yardstick to gauge the sentiments of Malay voters.

Much as both parties are expected to ride on the wave of public sentiments towards Dr Mahathir and Fadzil, the by-elections should also see the twists and turns of Malay politics and issues pertaining to the community.

While Umno will continue to share its track record with the voters, the

party can be expected to come under a lot of attack over its recent policies on education which affected Malay rights and privileges.

While Umno may explain the necessity for promoting the use of English, allowing 10 per cent intake of non-Malays into Mara Junior Science Colleges and matriculation courses and meritocracy, its political opponent can be expected to exploit them to their advantage.

However, before the battle is taken to the constituencies, the Malay community at large should understand these issues before taking sides.

For one, Pas had in the past been the strongest critic of Umno for defending Malay issues including rights and privileges, Bahasa Melayu and the quota system.

It describes all these as assobiyah or communalism whose roots are linked to elements of tribalism.

But today, Pas leaders seem to be in the forefront questioning the moves by the BN Government and especially Umno for introducing these policies which Pas claims are affecting the position of the Malays.

It is actually quite weird for Pas leaders to question, let alone attempt to champion the Malay cause, when it had been the harshest critic of Umno's struggle for Malay nationalism.

In fact, Fadzil when announcing the broad outlines of Pas' Islamic State during the party's general assembly last month, identified meritocracy as one of its agenda.

Unless, Pas has decided to shift its stand and policies following the change in the party leadership.

It is against this backdrop that Umno and Pas are entering the contest in Pendang and Anak Bukit.

And in this arena, the worst of the Malay values can be expected to show.

Despite claims of loving Dr Mahathir, lobbying to be chosen as candidates within the Umno circle is intense.

Those not selected can be expected to refuse to help the chosen ones, with some even going to the extent of sabotaging the candidates' chances.

As for Pas, the task of choosing its candidate may not be too much of a problem, but as it has already started to show, there will be crude and uncouth campaign styles.

All the talk of love and respect for each of their leaders - Dr Mahathir and the late Fadzil - will be of no essence.

These political animals will have no regard for anything that comes between them and their political ambitions.

They will desecrate the legacy of their leaders, be they dead or alive.