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By-election results a mirror for next polls

Balan Moses

NEVER has politics been as nerve-racking as it was on Thursday night when two giants clashed in the battlefields of Anak Bukit and Pendang.

While the tally at ballot box may have shown a razor-thin Barisan Nasional victory in the parliamentary constituency of Pendang and an equally-slim Pas win in the state constituency of Anak Bukit, the jury is out on which party won the hearts and minds of voters.

What is obvious is that the by-elections are a clear indicator of what can be expected at the next election.

The Bahasa Malaysia newspapers followed the run-up to the by-elections with keen interest given the fact that the political fight was in the Malay heartland of Kedah.

Berita Harian was magnanimous in saying that the results showed that the win in Pendang and the loss in Anak Bukit for the BN was an indication of the ruling coalition's strength.

The newspaper felt that the 283-vote win by Datuk Othman Abdul and the 508-vote loss by Datuk Zakaria Said in Pendang and Anak Bukit were not enough to come to a conclusion on whether the BN or Pas had made headway with Malay voters.

It felt that the results maintained the status quo although indicating that Pas had not lost its sting nor support.

Urging the BN and Umno to be vigilant, it said that the ruling party could not expect the general election to be fought on the same terms as the by-elections as its machinery would be spread thin around the country.

On Pas, Berita Harian felt the opposition party would use lessons learnt at the hustings last week in preparing for the polls next year.

Berita Harian had specific advice for the BN which it felt should be taken up if the coalition wanted to emerge a clear winner at the next general election:

Reduce in-fighting to the barest minimum, choose the right candidate, beware of sabotage and put its election machinery to the best use possible.

Berita Harian felt that the Pas victory in Anak Bukit would be the encouragement it needed in its declared objective to take over the State Government at the next polls.

The BN has 23 state seats in Kedah while Pas has 12 and Keadilan one.

The newspaper felt that it was up to Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain to get the BN machinery moving after the second consecutive by-election loss in the State.

As for Utusan Malaysia, it felt the BN victory in Pendang indicated a resurgence of its political clout in Kedah.

Pointing to the fact that Othman had managed to win back more than 1,000 votes from Pas to win the seat and that Zakaria had lost by a mere 508 votes, it opined that this augered well for the BN in the future.

If this was an indication of what was to come, the newspaper felt that the BN could regain the Anak Bukit state seat and win handsomely in Pendang at the next polls.

Utusan Malaysia said the BN's moderate and acceptable stance had won votes in the two constituencies while Pas' hardline stand and dubious election tactics had cost it some votes.

It quoted Prime Minister Datuk seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that it was Pas' fanatical supporters in Anak Bukit who turned the tide against

the BN. He has said that it was their willingness to do anything, even that which ran contrary to Islam and the Malay culture, that won Pas the seat.

In a scathing attack on Pas, the Prime Minister said Pas would have won in the seat if it had placed a tree stump as its candidate.