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Recent by-elections' happenings prove that the Malay mindset is now split

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AS the dust settles after the conclusion of the Anak Bukit and Pendang by-elections, attention is now turning to Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

Syed Razak, as the State Umno chief and director of Barisan Nasional election machinery for the by-elections, has taken responsibility for the party's performance, admitting that Umno needs to reassess its strengths and weaknesses in preparation for the next general election.

However, critics are not letting the fact that BN has lost two by-elections in Kedah since the 1999 general election escape his attention.

In November 2000, BN lost the Lunas State seat after the MIC candidate S. Anthonysamy was defeated by Parti Keadilan Nasional candidate Saifuddin Nasution Ismail.

The defeat resulted in BN losing its two-thirds majority in the State assembly but the party was given another chance to redeem itself in Thursday's Anak Bukit polls.

BN's failure to do so yet again raises questions about Umno's ability to check Pas' influence in Kedah.

There were doubts over whether Syed Razak had been able to rope in Umno leaders in the State to work together and if he could have done more to ensure a BN victory.

The Menteri Besar's detractors may have justification for raising such questions but those who were in Kedah for the recent by-elections would know it is not right to blame Syed Razak alone.

There were many factors which led to the failure of BN in wresting back the Anak Bukit seat and also the very slim majority of the ruling coalition in Pendang.

Topping the list is the almost fanatical support from some segments of the Malay community in certain areas for Pas.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has observed that such people would happily elect a "tree stump" if it were a Pas candidate.

Such is the support enjoyed by the so-called Islamic party that those who back it seemingly cannot be influenced to change their mindset.

Any suggestion that Malays were uniting under Pas are certainly untrue as the only thing that the party has succeeded in doing is actually splitting the community beyond hope.

Those who were in Pendang and Anak Bukit witnessed this first hand.

Some, especially those from the city, regarded campaigning in the by-elections akin to a war.

And just like scenes from a war zone, a police helicopter would hover day and night with a powerful searchlight.

Police sirens could also be heard daily as they made their way back and forth from Anak Bukit and Pendang.

At the end of campaigning, there were more than 40 police reports lodged regarding cases of assault, indecent exposures and also damage to property.

All the reports were lodged by BN workers and their accusations were levelled against Pas supporters.

These incidents just go on to show how difficult it is for the BN to reason with Pas supporters let alone win them over, which is what Syed Razak has to do to ensure a better BN performance in future by-elections.