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Pressure mounts and tension rises as campaigning heats up

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TIME is running out for Barisan Nasional and the Opposition campaigners to woo the voters before they cast their votes tomorrow.

The presence of thousands of election workers in Pendang and Anak Bukit constituencies depicts rising tension on both sides.

Knowing they have to intensify their campaign to get voters, they are willing to try everything they think can be of benefit to them.

To be more specific, most of them work on the basis of "do what you have to do" as long as there is an increase in votes for their candidates.

Dirty tactics? Yes, all these are part of the game.

Since the past few days the use of such tactics is widespread.

Even the Election Commission (EC) is concerned with this development, expressing disappointment over the crude and callous behaviour of the campaigners.

Resorting to dirty tactics, defying campaigning rules and guidelines are common phenomena in Malaysian politics and often, with the blessings of political parties.

"We had held 10 general elections and more than 350 by-elections until now yet we are seeing these things happening," EC secretary Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said of the Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit State by-elections' campaign.

There have also been allegations of thugs being engaged to intimidate supporters and causing disturbances throughout the campaigning period.

Reports of people being prevented from putting up banners and party flags and intimidation - both verbal and physical - were plenty in both constituencies.

Posters and leaflets containing defamatory words attacking Umno and Pas leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the late Pas President Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor are everywhere to be found.

Some were faxed, mailed or sent by hand to the Press, with the hope that the media will highlight them.

It will not be a surprise if new posters and leaflets emerged before polling day, causing tension to rise higher.

"You only need a small thing to provoke a fight in a tense situation like now," Umno Information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob said.

"I've repeatedly reminded Umno Youth particularly to be patient and not do things we do not want our Opponents to do to us."

Megat Junid, however, could not guarantee that BN workers would keep their cool.

"Even now, both sides are already pointing fingers on the distribution of leaflets which attacked Umno and Pas leaders," he said.

He added that he had asked the police not to impose double standards when handling cases brought before them.

Pas Youth chief Mahfuz Omar is putting the blame on Umno, alleging the party's "high handed" campaigning is the reason the Opposition is retaliating and resorting to pulling down posters and hindering campaigners from carrying out their duties.

"Umno is using reverse psychology and is responsible for distributing the leaflets which we are seeing today.

"They should be ashamed of their acts and not point fingers at the Opposition," he said.

Parti Keadilan Nasional deputy Youth chief Saifuddin Nasution Ismail

said: "It is too extreme to say that pulling down posters is an act of political immaturity.

"I am not saying that it is right but it is not as serious as Umno using Government agencies to complement the BN machinery. The EC should be looking into this first."

Let's hope campaigners from both sides have enough patience and avoid untoward incidents.