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BN-Terengganu

BN IS CONFIDENT OF WRESTING TERENGGANU BUT PAS IS SMILING

A News Analysis by: Ali mamat

KUALA TERENGGANU: The recent announcement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that there will be no general election before his retirement in October has not slowed down the political parties in Terengganu.

Instead, the electoral machinery of UMNO, the key party in the Barisan Nasional coalition and PAS, the dominant player in the opposition front, seems to have shifted to a higher gear.

The latest scenario reveals that PAS state and district leaders working day and night to stave off the rising challenge of UMNO to re-capture the state it had lost in the 1999 general election.

While most people would agree that UMNO's influence and inroads are rising in the state, the PAS leaders seem to be the least perturbed.

There were in fact some PAS leaders who claimed that the latest scenario were "staged" by the Terengganu people so that they would not be left out of the goodies handed out by UMNO and the federal government in the various forms of aid, like the "Wang Ehsan", a special monetary assistance.

"Let's wait for the general election... then we will know who is the choice of the rakyat," said Wan Hassan Wan Ramli, an Exco member of the Terengganu state government.

#### "BLUE WAVES"

Wan Hassan who is the Dungun PAS chief saw the challenge mounted by UMNO to re-capture the state under its "Blue Waves" assault as nothing more than a din to confuse the people, while keeping the Umno central party leaders happy.

"If we are afraid of the waves, we will not be brave enough to build our houses by the shore," he said with a laugh.

He also scoffed at the claims by UMNO leaders that looking at the present state of developments in the state, the voters would be most unlikely to cast their ballots for PAS to administer Terengganu again.

In almost all the meetings with the rakyat lately, Deputy State Liaison chief of Umno Terengganu Datuk Idris Jusoh and the other leaders had openly stated their confidence that BN would return to power in the next general election.

This confidence stems from their "head-count" of voters likely to cast their ballots for the BN in all 32 state and eight parliamentary constituencies, a task undertaken by the party machinery.

Idris and almost all the state leaders interviewed, were of the view that Umno has the best chance to win at least 16 state seats, including four currently in their hands.

They also felt that they have a more than 50 percent chance in seven other state seats.

#### THE STATE SEATS

As expected, they declined to name the seats but some observers reckoned that among the seats that Umno feels comfortable with are Kuala Besut, Kampung Raja and Hulu Besut in the Besut parliamentary constituency; Permaisuri, Langkap and Batu Rakit (in Setiu); Seberang Takir and Bukit Tunggal (in Kuala Nerus); Bandar and Ladang (in Kuala Terengganu); Telemong and Ajil (in Hulu Terengganu); Bukit Besi and Rantau Abang (in Dungun);

Kemasik, Kijal, Chukai and Air Putih (in Kemaman).

Among the seats where Umno has a good chance provided the party works harder on the rather large numbers of "fence-sitters" are Jertih in Besut, Jabi (in Setiu), Pengkalan Berangan (in Marang), Manir and Kuala Berang (in Hulu Terengganu) and Paka (in Dungun).

The Umno assumption is based on the large numbers of PAS supporters leaving the party, including the 2,000-odd in Besut who crossed the floor recently.

Exposure after exposure of PAS failure to develop the state, failure to spur the economy, abuses of religion for political ends, misdeeds and abuses by its leaders, failure to fulfill election promises, also fan the rising confidence of Umno, said the observers.

Wan Hassan conceded that PAS is now forced to work harder in one or two state seats in its hands but generally they would be returned to power in the next polls.

#### HEAVY GOING FOR PAS

On the whole, the PAS supporters quietly agreed that the party would find it tough to defend Kuala Besut, Hulu Besut, Permaisuri, Langkap, Bandar, Bukit Besi, Kijal, Chukai and Air Putih -- all of which the party had won with a slim majority of 87 to 598 votes.

Nevertheless Wan Hassan reminded Umno not to be too confident and be taken up by those slim majorities or the issues raised against the party.

If they get their reckonings wrong, not only would the majority in those seats be increased but PAS might also win the four seats which Umno controls, he said.

The four seats are Seberang Takir, Telemong, Ajil and Kemasik which Umno won with a majority of 557, 660, 125 and 104 votes, respectively.

PAS is basing its confidence on its ability to meet its major election pledges like abolishing the quit rent for residential housing, issuing of land titles, banning licensed gambling and sale of liquor.

Most of the PAS leaders are confident that the granting of the land titles is an important weapon for the party when facing the electorate in the next polls because, they claimed, "what Umno had failed to do in the 40 years of its rule in Terengganu, PAS could do it the moment it took over the state in 1999."

#### SELLING SLOGANS

In this connection, the party is now going all out to peddle their rather cynical slogans, "Vote for Umno if you want to pay quit rents again, if you want the granting of land titles to be halted, if you want the betting outlets to be re-opened and if you want liquor to be sold everywhere."

In fact, PAS claims that the distribution of aid in the form of "Wang Ehsan" is a blessing in disguise in that it is given in place of the oil royalty which the federal government withheld from the state.

Members of the PAS People's Committee (or Jawatankuasa Syura Rakyat) who are the foot soldiers, had lost no time to drive home the message to the people that they were able to receive the "Wang Ehsan" because PAS rules the state.

"Vote for the BN in the next election if you don't want the Wang Ehsan," they insinuated.

The withdrawal of the oil royalty is also exploited by the PAS leaders with some of them claiming that there are a lot more which they could do for the people if Terengganu continues to receive the royalties.

In this battle for the mind and votes of the people, Umno should not under-estimate the PAS ability to line up its defence.

What is clear is that PAS is not resting on its laurels given the challenge mounted by Umno which are hinting of concrete results, like the 2,000-odd PAS members in Besut who opted to join Umno. -- Bernama  
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