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Pendang-Election
ANOTHER BN-PAS SHOWDOWN LOOMS IN PENDANG

A news focus by Mohd Nazri Hassan

ALOR SETAR, Feb 27 (Bernama) -- The Pendang parliamentary constituency, won by Barisan Nasional (BN) in a by-election two years back with a majority of 283 votes, is again expected to be an intense battleground between BN and PAS in the upcoming general election.

PAS is expected to pull out all the stops in its efforts to regain the seat won by its former president, the late Datuk Fadzil Noor.

The early signs of a looming battle have gone up with numerous PAS banners and flags seen lining the streets in the constituency.

Pendang is among the eight parliamentary seats won by PAS in Kedah in the 1999 general election. Fadzil polled 22,413 votes to beat BN's Datuk Othman Abdul by 2,939 votes. Othman received 19,474 votes.

There are two state seats in Pendang constituency. Sungai Tiang went to BN and Bukit Raya, to PAS.

Following Fadzil's death, BN regained Pendang in a by-election held in 2002. This time Othman polled 22,825 votes, defeating a new face from PAS, Dr Mohamad Hayati Othman, who received 22,542 votes.

Pendang, which now has an electorate of 57,167, is a PAS stronghold especially in Bukit Raya, a state constituency which has never been won by BN.

Now Bukit Raya is known as Tokai, after the Election Commission's redelineation exercise in 2003.

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has even described Pendang as a "tough area" due to Fadzil's influence there.

Dr Mahathir himself had lost in the same constituency in the 1969 general election when Pendang was then known as the Kota Setar Selatan parliamentary constituency.

"I have lost there (Kota Setar Selatan). This is a black area...Kedah people call it pitch-black," he said when asked to comment on BN's victory in the Pendang by-election.

However PAS is not invincible in Pendang or elsewhere. Fadzil

himself

had lost in the 1990 general election to Othman. The PAS candidate polled 17,349 votes, bowing out to Othman who got 20,554 votes.

Five years later, Othman retained the seat after he beat PAS' Mohamad Taulan Rasul on a 1,961-vote majority. The former polled 20,336 votes to his opponent's 18,375.

However former PAS national youth chief, Mahfuz Omar, said BN cannot take pride with its slim victory in the Pendang by-election as BN was helped by an increased voter turnout, some 10 per cent more as compared to that in the 1999 general election.

"Othman should not feel safe. If the non-Malays do not come out to cast their votes or the turnout returns to between 70 and 76 per cent instead of 86 per cent, it is not going to favour the BN," said Mahfuz, who is the member of parliament for Pokok Sena.

He said an analysis of the by-election results showed that for every polling channel, all the Malay votes especially from the youths went to PAS.

He said Umno was fortunate to have the support from Chinese voters and those of Thai descent in the constituency who numbered some 5,000.

"This shows the Malays who voted for PAS in the past elections are not easily swayed by BN propaganda," he said.

Even though the Dewan Rakyat has yet to be dissolved, PAS has taken the lead in putting up flags in Pendang. A Bernama check in Tokai found hundreds of PAS flags flying along streets in the state constituency.

Only a few BN or Umno banners were seen, but an Umno supporter Razak Khamis said: "The number of flags or posters put up by the opposition is no clear indication that they are going to win. We have proven this in the past elections".

Umno supporters have expressed confidence that BN's victory in the Pendang by-election showed that the Malay voters have returned to supporting the party.

Othman said several major issues contributed to his defeat in 1999,

including the sacking of Datuk Seri Dr Anwar Ibrahim from the party and government.

He said at that time, some 1,000 Umno members in Pendang had refused to come out and cast their votes on polling day.

"I lost to Fadzil due to this issue, but now there are no major issues for the opposition to capitalise and manipulate and based on this factor we are confident that the BN can win Pendang in the coming general election," he said.

He said no matter who the BN would field as its candidate in Pendang, the party's election machinery is ready to face PAS and ensure outright victory not only in the parliamentary constituency but also in its state constituencies of Sungai Tiang and Tokai.

-- BERNAMA

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