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Astaman all out to win Titiwangsa

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Astaman Abdul Aziz, the Barisan Nasional candidate for Titiwangsa, is an old hand in politics.

Facing a straight fight with Pas' Mohammad Noor Mohamed, Astaman, who has politics in his blood, is going all out to retain the BN stronghold.

The 51-year-old certainly has more than his fair share of obstacles since he was picked to replace Umno stalwart Datuk Dr Suleiman Mohamad, the MP for the past four terms.

He worked earnestly to win over Suleiman's hardcore supporters, including calling the "main players" in the constituency for a pow-wow at the Kelab Sultan Sulaiman with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the moderator. The closed-door meeting helped resolve the issue.

Some people do not accept him as a local candidate, even though he was born in Kampung Baru and is the chairman of Wangsa Maju Umno division, which is almost next door.

Few are aware that his mother is Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, a long-time leader of Wanita Umno, and from whom he learnt about politics. The third child from a family of four, he was born on Aug 30 and had his early education at the St John's Institution before studying at the Royal Military College in Sungei Besi. He furthered his studies at Kings College, London University, where he met his wife Norsiah Abdul Wahab.

Aware that he has to be seen as well as heard, he has taken the right approach by going aggressively on house-to-house visits. Astaman is not into ceramah sessions because he says Pas could easily "create and misinterpret issues".

There are those who suggest that it would be to his advantage to bring his mother around because even if they are not familiar with him, they would vote for him because of her, while others have proposed that bringing along Suleiman during his campaign would reflect a show of solidarity.

He is a hit with the women voters and his moustache is a topic of hot discussions among them, but he knows looks alone will not ensure their votes so he expounds his programmes for the area.

Astaman is indeed more than just looks. He's practical and isn't keen on making lofty promises.

"To reach voters, one has to be down to earth. National issues can be too abstract for them and they get confused. It is the local issues that will appeal to them like the non-functioning traffic lights, the flash floods as well as social problems," he said.

He gets a lot of inquiries about the flash floods, to which he said the drainage system in Kampung Baru is efficient but the real problem is the flood mitigation system which sometimes does not work. He assures them that the authorities are looking into the problem with the Drainage and Irrigation Department.

Being the family man that he is, the thrust of his campaign is on the family institution.

He says social ills, such as petty crimes and drug abuse, are on the rise because families are not adapting well to the changing environment.

"Barisan Nasional has my vote," said Kamariah Bakar, 65, who has been staying in Kampung Padang, Kampung Baru, since World War II.

Her friend, Saadiah Hassan, 57, said on polling day everyone would come out in full force to support him.

Mary Ammal Anthony, 68, from the Pikeliling Flats, who also came out to welcome Astaman on his rounds, said: "The BN has helped us and this is my turn to help them."