

**Tenang before the storm**  
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The residents living around the quiet hills of Tenang may well be jolted out of their reverie as the fanfare of a by-election is set to roll into their town.

While the Election Commission falls back to fix the date for the country's 14th by-election following the death of BN assemblyman Sulaiman Taha (right) early today, the one thing the people of Tenang can expect is a sudden flood of activity into their placid lifestyle.

The rolling hills and laid-back atmosphere of the constituency perfectly reflect the name of the town, which means 'calm' in Malay.

The semi-agrarian residents of Tenang also represent the perfect racial blend that would be indicative of the nation's overall voting trends - making this a definitive battle between BN and Pakatan Rakyat.

The impending contest is symbolically important, for despite Johor being a BN stronghold, particularly so an Umno stronghold, Tenang has a balanced racial mix and is considered a fair micro-representation of the sentiments of the voters in the peninsula.

The number of registered voters under this state seat stood at 14,511 in 2008, with Malays accounting for 7,196, Chinese (5,549), Indians 1,752 and the 'lain-lain' (others) making up 14 votes.

#### Small margins of victory

Sulaiman, said to have died from complications related to diabetes, won the seat with 6,367 votes in the 2008 general election, amounting to a 2,492-vote majority over PAS candidate Mohd Saim Siran's 3,875 votes.

The votes, however, were a 16 percent decrease for the BN if compared with the 2004 general election, with the opposition winning three of 12 polling centres under the Tenang seat - Bandar Labis Timor, Bandar Labis Tengah and Labis.

Tenang is one of two state seats under the Labis parliamentary constituency, that has long been an MCA bastion and is now held by Chua Tee Yong, the son of MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek.

The other state seat is Bekok, currently held by MCA's Tan Kok Hong.

The BN's wins in these three seats in the last general election were relatively slim, with Chua taking 13,658 votes, or a 4,094-vote majority, against DAP's Teo Eng Ching (9,564 votes) out of the total 33,468 voters.

The difference was even smaller in Bekok, with Tan (7,510 votes) garnering a 1,944-vote majority over the DAP's Chan Teck Chee (5,566 votes).

Sulaiman is the 11th elected representative to have passed away since the March 2008 general election.

Three other by-elections were called as a result of resignations - that of Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (Permatang Pauh, August 2008), V Arumugam (Bukit Selambau, April 2009) and Mohammad Fairus Khairuddin (Penanti, May 2009).

PAS likely to contest

The DAP will be meeting on Dec 23 to plan for the impending by-election.

"The Pakatan Rakyat leadership council has yet to meet on the issue of which candidate will represent Pakatan in the upcoming Tenang by-election but, as always, all Pakatan parties will go all out to ensure a Pakatan victory in Tenang," said party's election chief Tan Kok Wai.

It is likely that PAS will again be leading the charge in this by-election.

This by-election will provide both the government and the opposition an indication of the level of support from the various ethnic groups ahead of a snap general election.

Given that the constituency is also considered MCA chief Soi Lek's territory, the Chinese vote will be taken as a litmus test on the leadership of the newly-minted party boss.

Interestingly, the Johor state assembly is in the midst of making an amendment to its state constitution to forgo the holding of a by-election should the vacated seat have no effect to the balance of power.

The amendment is still in its second reading, and will not affect the existing vacancy in Tenang.

BN controls 50 seats in the state assembly, while DAP has four and PAS, two.

Tenang will be the first by-election to be fought in Johor since the 2008 general election, and it is also the first by-election in this southern state in 20 years.

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