

**Pakatan launches early assault on Tenang**  
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With still two weeks to go before nominations are filed for the Tenang by-election, the opposition coalition is already putting its machinery in place to gain an early advantage over rival BN.

Two days after PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang (right) and his deputy Nasharudin Mat Isa inspected the local election machinery, the party is organising the first of a series of large-scale ceramah (political talks) tonight.

This will feature heavyweight national leaders like PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim, vice-president Tian Chua, Johor PKR chief Chua Jui Meng, Youth head Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin, PAS vice-president Salehuddin Ayub, Johor commissioner Mahfodz Muhammad and Johor DAP chief Dr Boo Cheng Hau.

The ceramah are aimed at two Malay-majority BN strongholds. Anwar will deliver a brief speech at Kampung Ayer Panas before unleashing his missiles at Felda Cempelak, one of the three such settlements in the constituency where PAS scored poorly in the last general election.

Anwar will return to Tenang on Thursday to meet Chinese voters at a dinner organised by PKR in Labis, a Chinese majority-suburb in the state seat.

The dinner aims to raise campaign funds for Pakatan. So far 60 of some 80 tables have been taken up at a price of RM500 per table.

However, the police have refused to grant a permit for tonight's event.

"This is not a campaign. Obviously tonight is an event to meet the people. It is just a normal programme for leaders to meet the people. We hope they won't be any problems," said PAS deputy campaign operations director Mazlan Aliman, stressing that the ceramah will continue as planned.

Mazlan, who is leading the National Association of Children of Felda Settlers, a movement to uphold the rights and welfare of Felda settlers, will also be speaking during the ceramah.

Last August, a ceramah organised by PKR in Rengit, Johor, featuring Anwar, was broken up by police and Federal Reserve Unit for "security reasons". Seven people were arrested while dispersing.

Meanwhile, DAP will start distributing leaflets at night markets this weekend. The leaflets will question the government's decision to support the construction of the 100-storey mega-tower while increasing the prices of daily goods.

The increase in water tariff last November in Johor, which already has the highest rate in the country, will be another issue in the by-election.

**'What voters need'**

Mazlan said that, from now until Jan 15, PAS will focus on making arrangements for local and out-of-town party workers who will be involved in campaigning.

There will be more activities as nomination day - Jan 22 - gets closer, with the election machinery to bring in leaders from other states to meet voters.

"These activities will have a personal touch due to the situation in Johor. You cannot compare Johor with Perak or Selangor. This will be a harmonious and peaceful by-election. Both sides will meet the voters and let them make a final decision," said Mazlan (left).

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Ahmad Maslan, who is in charge of Felda affairs, had earlier claimed that BN could secure 80 percent of support from settlers in Tenang.

Mazlan was equally confident that PAS could spring a surprise.

"I expect there will be a change among young voters in Felda. We will see (the extent of) youth support on Jan 30, and whether his (Ahmad) statement is right," he said.

The by-election was triggered by the death of state legislative assemblyperson Sulaiman Taha from Umno on Dec 17 last year.

The constituency, a traditional Umno stronghold, is located within the parliamentary constituency of Labis, now held by Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Chua Tee Yong from MCA.

Polling will take place on Jan 30.

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