

Tenang: Battle of two Chuas
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The Tenang by-election will likely see two prominent politicians from both sides of the political divide wooing the Chinese votes.

All eyes will be on MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek and son Chua Tee Yong, who is Labis MP, on one side, and former MCA vice-president Chua Jui Meng on the opposite side to pull in the votes.

The MCA has been under tremendous pressure to deliver the Chinese votes to the BN following the party's poor performance in the last general election in 2008 and to prove it can win back enough support for the ruling coalition in the next general election.

On top of that, the declining majority of the BN's candidate in the area in the last election has also made the effort tougher as the non-Malay voters, particularly the Chinese, seem to be leaning towards the opposition, with the BN winning mostly due to the solid Malay support.

Many political analysts believed the two Chuas will play a key role in securing the non-Malay votes to their respective party to the extent that some describing the by-election on Jan 30 as "the battle of two Chuas".

While the Malay votes are considered to be already in the BN's bag, analysts said both sides need to reach out to, and gauge the support of, the non-Malays - which form 52 per cent of the 14,592 electorates - as it could provide some indication of how the Chinese and Indians will vote in the next general election.

The Chinese voters make up 39 per cent of the Tenang electorates while Indians make up 12 per cent. The Malay voters make up the rest.

Tenang is one of two state seats under the Labis parliamentary constituency, previously held by Dr Chua before being contested by his son Tee Yong in the last general election.

Before Dr Chua, the seat was held by former MCA president Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Biggest test for Soi Lek

Dr Chua has been working hard to revitalise the MCA since taking over the party's reins in March last year following a party election, and to some extent, managed to bring stability after more than a year of internal bickering.

However, political analysts believe the biggest test for Dr Chua will be in this by-election, held in his own stronghold.

The first by-election faced by Dr Chua after being elected party president was the Hulu Selangor by-election, which showed the Chinese support to the BN dropping to a new low.

Things seemed to be improving in the Galas and Batu Sapi by-elections. In Galas, most of

the polling stations in Chinese areas showed a major shift of the Chinese support towards the BN.

In Tenang this time around, the PKR-DAP-PAS opposition pact is likely to bank on Chua Jui Meng, former health minister and former MCA vice-president, to pull in the non-Malay votes, with PAS concentrating on Felda and other Malay majority areas.

Political analysts believed that Jui Meng, who was recently re-appointed as PKR vice-president, would want to go all out to prove his mettle in his home state.

He is still seen to command some support and capable of throwing a spanner into BN's strategy.

"Everyone knows it's difficult to capture Tenang from the BN but what the opposition pact wants is to reduce the BN's majority to claim a moral victory. This will be good enough for us," said a PKR insider.

The battle of the two Chuas has been shaping up in Tenang since the past weeks, with the opposition organising ceramah featuring Jui Meng.

Not to be outdone, the MCA mobilises its machinery and organising programmes, many of which involved Dr Chua.

Their focus is the Chinese majority areas such as Bandar Labis Timor, Bandar Labis Tengah and Labis where in the last general election, the PAS candidate obtained between 50 to 67 per cent of the votes.

Chinese voters shied away

For instance, in Bandar Labis Tengah where 96 per cent of the voters were Chinese, PAS, which contested the Tenang seat, obtained 66.8 per cent.

Johor DAP chairperson Boo Cheng Hau said the opposition pact's greatest hurdle would be in convincing the Chinese about PAS' Islamic state ambition.

He added that detailed analysis showed that in the 2008 general election, Chinese voters backed DAP in the overall Labis parliamentary seat but shied away from PAS in the Tenang state seat.

"At the parliamentary level, about 70 per cent of Tenang constituents voted for the DAP instead of BN's MCA. But at the state level, only 58 per cent of them voted for PAS. The trend is also prevalent among the Indians voters," he said.

He believed that the by-election would be another test for the opposition's election machinery, even more so when the MCA was likely to use the Islamic state issue to frighten non-Malay electorates.

"We have done that in the Sibuluan by-election. However, different constituency, different situation and different scenario. There is no single standard formula," he said, adding that Umno has a large vote bank from the over 3,800 voters in three Felda settlements - Felda Cempelak, Felda Cempelak Barat and Felda Tenang.

"In the last election, we managed to garner only 17 per cent, 18 per cent and 19 per cent of

votes in the three Felda areas respectively," he said.

Analysts believed the MCA would be working in repeating the Galas feat which saw a major shift of Chinese votes towards the BN.

The Tenang seat fell vacant following the death of its state assemblyperson Sulaiman Taha Dec 17. The nomination is on Jan 22 while polling is on Jan 30.

- Bernama

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