

BN off to a flying start in Tenang
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Although the Tenang state constituency is regarded as a BN stronghold, the ruling coalition is not taking chances and have mobilised its overwhelming machinery in the area in recent weeks.

Led by Johor Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman (left), who has reportedly been "stationed" in the constituency since late last month, BN is seeking to resolve all local issues in the area well ahead of polling on Jan 30.

According to several locals, luxury vehicles bearing various government crests have been making a beeline for the constituency which is a hive of activity for various functions organised by government agencies.

"In terms of local development, there are no issues... 99.9 percent of problems related to water, electricity and roads have been resolved," said Labis Umno division vice-chief Hashim Daud when contacted.

With local issues apparently out of the way, BN is preparing itself for the onslaught of national issues which the opposition is expected to raise during the campaign.

MB 'berkampung' in Tenang

Hashim predicts that the opposition will harp on the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the death of Teoh Beng Hock, which may resonate among the Chinese voters who make up slightly over a third of the constituents.

Nevertheless, Hashim is confident that BN would be able to tell its side of the story.

"Our campaign machinery is moving smoothly because our by-election director is the menteri besar. He has been berkampung (stationed) in the constituency every day since he came back to Malaysia in December."

Other than government agencies, BN's campaigners involve mostly people from the state as vote canvassers from other states have yet to arrive.

Next week, BN's campaign will be raised a few notches as Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his deputy Muhyiddin Yassin are scheduled for back-to-back visits beginning Tuesday.

Muhyiddin is scheduled to announce the candidate on Wednesday.

Deputy ministers deployed

Meanwhile, MCA has gone back to its tried and tested formula of assigning its seven deputy ministers to "adopt" seven different Chinese-majority areas.

"They will be organising programmes to interact with the residents here," said MCA supreme council member Chua Tee Yong who is also the Labis MP.

Tenang is one of the two state seats under Labis parliamentary constituency, the other state seat Bekok is held by Tan Kok Hong, also from MCA. Chua (left) is also MCA by-election director at the state level.

According to him, MCA is currently organising pre-festival activities in the constituency as Chinese New Year, Thaipusam and Ponggal are around the corner.

"Currently, we are not 100 percent ready. Our activities are focused on interacting with the people and understanding their problems.

"We will step up our activities after the candidate is announced to introduce the candidate to as many voters as possible," Chua said.

Battle over price hike

When told that the opposition's campaign will be heavily weighted on inflation and the rise in prices of essential goods, Chua said that this will create some negative sentiments.

On the upside, Chua said that voters are unlikely to decide based on a single issue.

He argued inflation is a worldwide phenomenon due to various reasons including climate change, adverse weather in China and the second quantitative easing by United States, which are beyond the government's control.

"Other countries also face the same problems especially during festive seasons. Their situation is worse than us. The inflation rate in India is 15 percent and in Indonesia is six to seven percent," Chua elaborated.

Asked if the high commodity prices, which is a boon for the Tenang folk who are mainly are involved in the palm oil and rubber sector, would give BN a leg up, Chua said that this was not part of his consideration.

"I believe we cannot take it for granted. There are other problems that need to be solved."

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