

**PAS fighting losing battle in Felda  
Malaysiakini.com  
January 27, 2011**

ANALYSIS With DAP making significant inroads among the Chinese voters, all eyes are now on the 7,014 Malay voters, who will be instrumental in delivering the 5,000-vote majority BN seeks.

More than half of the Malay voters live in the three Felda settlements in Tenang - Felda Tenang, Felda Chemplak and Felda Chemplak Barat - which alone account for 4,118 registered voters.

The former BN assemblyperson for the seat, Sulaiman Taha, bagged 80 percent of the votes cast in these three settlements in the last general election in this northern Johor constituency, despite the '2008 political tsunami'.

Soaring commodity prices have boosted the settlers' income. Each family is earning between RM2,000 and RM10,000 a month, therefore the issue of inflation propagated by the opposition does not resonate with them.

Since nomination day, PAS campaign activities and ceramah in these areas have drawn a lukewarm response from the settlers. Some of these were attended only by campaign workers and Pakatan Rakyat supporters from outside.

Even PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim and PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, who easily attract huge crowds in election campaign trails, lost their charm here. The settlers prefer to sip their teh tarik at nearby stalls or watching Astro channels from home, rather than listen to fiery speeches.

Meanwhile, PAS-linked Persatuan Anak Felda (Anak), made up largely of the second generation of Felda settlers, is facing competition from a new pro-BN organisation, Jawatankuasa Badan Bertindak Generasi Kedua Felda, which plays the same role as Anak, but aims to find solutions to Felda problems through "internal channels".

"I don't know Anak and I don't know him (Anak chief Mazlan Aliman). Why do we need him since we have our own representative?" said Mat Lambok Baharom (right), a Felda committee member.

The night ceramah of the opposition leaders could not make any significant impact in the conservative settlements, unlike the Umno machinery that focuses on welfare, and which adopts more personal touches, such as religious classes for women, sports competitions and motorbike service training for the youth.

The reason is clear - almost every family in the settlements hoist both BN and Umno flags in front of their houses.

**Second generation's angst**

However, dissatisfaction is brewing among the second generation of Felda settlers over issues related to insufficient agriculture and housing land, and the lack of job opportunities.

When the government launched Felda settlements in 1960s, 10 acres of land were given to each settler. When their children inherited the land, problems arose because one of the children would become the trust holder, who is supposed to distribute the yield to the other siblings. However, there is no law or guideline to ensure a fair distribution of the yield, leading to disputes among the siblings.

In addition, if a settler has many children, a 10-acre land is hardly enough to support all of them.

Apart from agriculture land, the children need to apply for housing land, since the settlers are allowed to build only one house on the plots originally given to the settlers.

Felda settlements are also not able to keep the youth as job opportunities there are limited. Those with lower qualifications who do not want low-level jobs, such as lorry drivers or plantation workers, usually ended up in the cities as urban poor.

These are the problems that BN needs to tackle before they are capitalised by the opposition.

The one-day visit by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to all three settlements before the nomination day was a pre-emptive strike to defuse the disgruntlements.

His announcement of a RM8.5 million allocation for infrastructure development and 500 housing lots to second generation Felda settlers did convince residents there that the government was working on solutions to their woes.

This is followed by Prime Minister's Department deputy minister Ahmad Maslan who announced yesterday that the Johor government would address the issue of insufficient land by giving out lots to the children of the settlers.

However, Ahmad said, the government policy was to encourage the children to lead a better life outside the Felda settlements, just like Malays elsewhere.

But, as the opposition has pointed out, how successful has been the government in preparing these Felda youth to compete in the urban areas?

The difficulties faced by the second generation of settlers have given opportunities to the opposition, but their first challenge is to break the information barrier in these areas, where most folk read Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia every day.

### **Felda's 'two fathers'**

A Malaysiakini survey in the three Felda settlements showed that most residents there were not aware of the issues raised by opposition, such as BN candidate Azahar Ibrahim's alleged corruption in a land sale, PAS candidate Normala Sudirman's 'handshake' dispute and the Islamic state agenda, which have been hotly debated by leaders from both sides.

Many of them were thankful to the 'two fathers' - Azahar's father Ibrahim Daud, the former Tenang assemblyperson, and Najib's father Abdul Razak Hussein, who started the Felda programme.

"The BN candidate has come here three times. He is a kampung folk and his father was an

assemblyperson," Mat Lambok told Malaysiakini when met at a stall in Felda Chemplak.

"We supported his father because he was a good man. He would help us when we need it. And if he couldn't do it, he would tell us too."

Another youth from Felda, Mohd Saiful Mat Isa, 24, said Azahar had assisted the Felda people even before he was selected as the candidate.

felda tenang calon"Since I was small, Azahar has helped me quite a lot," he said, adding that he didn't think much of PAS candidate Normala Sudirman.

Najib's decision to take over Felda portfolio in 2004 and to portray himself as a successor to protect his father's legacy gives the settlers more reasons to support Umno.

On the other hand, one of the 10 commitments in Pakatan's 100-day pledge - to dismantle Felda plantations and open up its farms to second and third generation Felda settlers - has apparently been roundly rejected by the settlers. Dismantling the very institution that pulled them out of poverty is, to them, unthinkable.

Unless, of course, PAS, in the three days left for campaigning, is able to effectively convey its message to the Felda voters in Tenang that alternative solutions to their problems are possible.

Otherwise, a heavy defeat for PAS in these three Felda settlements is imminent.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.  
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/154607>