

**Late-blooming Pakatan tries to steal the show**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**March 2, 2011**

Half-way through the Merlimau by-election campaign, the party appears to have only begun.

Dominated by BN, where Malacca Chief Minister and by-election director Mohd Ali Rustam is pulling out at all stops thus far, late-bloomer Pakatan Rakyat now appears set to turn things around.

But whether this is too late remains to be seen.

On the BN side, Mohd Ali (left in picture) and his crew are not shy of using all the resources at hand, including that from the deep pockets of the state and federal government, despite it being a 'BN stronghold'.

Mohd Ali, whose ambition to move up the Umno ladder is no secret, has been on the campaign trail from morning to night every day since Day One, not wanting to risk losing a state assembly seat months prior to a snap general election, which is speculated to be held this year.

As the ruling coalition, the BN's message is of the development which it claims to have proven to be capable of delivering, with billboards of photos of the many public amenities within Merlimau.

And whatever that the opposition claims to have been mismanaged are "slander" and "lies" from which Malaysia should be "saved".

Veiled threats of withheld allocations, coupled with claims of a debt of gratitude for the "stability and development" brought by the government, are also staple fodder for BN.

Starting the campaign early with guns blazing, the same anecdotes have now been repeated throughout the small constituency, and are getting to be somewhat old.

BN has also aggressively pursued the message of mistrust, painting PAS as a deviant extreme party which is now so confused and desperate that it is making its bed with the allegedly anti-Islam DAP.

Such messages are heard on the ceramah trail which have consistently attracted seemingly hardcore BN supporters in the hundreds, as well as in the mysterious 'BTN video' which is being played across the constituency.

**Pakatan overwhelmed by barrage?**

The BN machinery, which was shaky in the beginning following threats of a boycott by sidelined potential candidates and their supporters, is also well-organised, with campaign messages consistent and timed to the tee.

Although it is not apparent in the machinery organisation, rumours are still swirling around town about factions within Jasin Umno being unhappy with Roslan Ahmad's candidacy and

only half-heartedly joining the campaign.

This includes less than formal aspects of the campaign which Pakatan is attributing to BN, including lewd leaflets featuring Pakatan leaders, special edition 'by-election newspapers' and fake banners promising heaven to those who vote for PAS.

Thuggery and vandalism (or reverse psychology, as claimed by BN) has also crept into the campaign with PAS banners slashed, a car windshield smashed and allegation of arson by DAP.

While one or two PAS-friendly unattributed banners have been spotted, all this seems to be overwhelming the slow-starting Pakatan by-election team which is only now, at the halfway mark, getting its act together.

PKR, which has largely been silent in the campaign, made its presence felt in Ayer Merbau and Chinchin yesterday by organising events for its de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim (left), whose superstar status drew in crowds that Pakatan had up to then yet to see in this campaign.

DAP, too have been campaigning hard, with its Malacca assemblypersons working both the Chinese crowds in intimate events in residential areas and the mostly Malay crowd at PAS events.

Their message is simple: 'One opposition extra assemblyperson won't rock your prized stability, but my goodness, don't we need some help in the state assembly as BN is having a free hand there, especially on Islamic issues like zakat money about which we, as non-Muslims, have not been able to question them.'

Anwar's presence in Merlimau yesterday also managed to break through the 'members only' conundrum, with fence-sitters coming to hear the PKR leader speak, along with the converted who had come in drips and drabs at prior events.

### **BN candidate tries to prove worth**

But while the Pakatan campaign appears to be picking up, PAS candidate Yuhaizad Abdullah appears to be outshone by the BN candidate, who despite his slight figure appears articulate and on the ball.

While Yuhaizad is approachable, speaks with constituents with ease and is able to deliver a good speech, he fumbles when facing the media and is unable to answer queries head-on without the assistance of his posse.

Yuhaizad reasonably argues that he cannot make promises on what he will do for Merlimau as he is not part of the ruling coalition, but the local boy also falters when questioned on problems faced by the youth (which make up about half of the voters).

Roslan (second from left in picture), who has been trying hard to prove that he was not just chosen because he is from a prominent local Umno family, faces both media and voters with the same collected demeanour.

His answers are reasoned, and while he too travels with an entourage of campaign managers, they never speak for him.

And despite the apparent dirty tactics attributed to BN, Roslan maintains his clean image, calling for a stop to derogatory and less than civilised campaign material and behaviour.

He also appears to be more in control of his own campaign, announcing strategies like their cyber approach himself rather than pushing it to the party to explain as Yuhaizad does.

All the same, with the Anwar event setting the stage for a stronger Pakatan campaign, Yuhaizad has less than five days to ride this momentum to prove that he, too, is worthy.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/157460>