

**Merlimau may determine Pakatan's fate in Malacca**  
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**ANALYSIS** With the campaign moving into the home stretch, it is now more and more apparent that the fight for Merlimau goes beyond winning and losing.

According to DAP Kota Melaka assemblyperson Sim Tong Hin, with about 10 semi-rural seats in Malacca with the same sort of ethnic demograph, Merlimau will be a litmus test for Pakatan's relevance in the state.

Although PAS candidate Yuhaizad Abdullah the notion that he's fighting a losing battle, Sim believes that what they are actually fighting for is to keep BN's winning majority at 2,000 or less.

If Pakatan can limit BN's winning margin to that amount then it means that the tsunami winds of change are still blowing in Malacca.

BN, however, has a different idea. Taking the Merlimau by-election as preparation in the lead-up to the general election, chief minister and BN by-election director Mohd Ali Rustam is moving with guns blazing to prop himself up for a stunning victory in Malacca later in the year.

Already, BN is asking voters to deliver it "back to the beginning", that is, to return to the good old days of 2004 when the winning majority was more than 5,000.

"If more than 5,000 vote for BN, it means that there is a swing back to BN across the demographics and this will be disastrous for Pakatan in Malacca," Sim said.

It may also have repercussions throughout the country, he said, as a large portion of state assembly and parliamentary seats are in semi-rural areas, quite unlike the almost exclusively Malay seat of Kerdu, where the aim is mostly to slam Premier Najib Abdul Razak in his home state.

**'Reality is more dismal'**

Despite PAS' bold declaration that it has 41 percent of Malay votes in hand in Merlimau, Sim said the reality was more dismal.

PAS, he said, could only be sure of about 25 percent of the Malay votes, while BN had hardcore supporters in about 40 percent of the community, which makes up 6,935 votes.

That leaves some 35 percent up for grabs, and BN is gunning hard for this by waging a Malay-Muslim psychological war.

Largely moderate and accommodating, some Muslims in Merlimau are taking the bait laid out through leaflets, posters and even ceramah sessions painting PAS as a deviant extremist party.

Leaflets distributed by Puteri Umno during a visit by BN candidate Roslan Ahmad listed 'quotes' by PAS leaders promising Heaven for PAS supporters and the like.

One stall owner exclaimed ajaran sesat! (deviant teachings!)” upon reading the leaflet, indicating displeasure of PAS' purported 'radical' Islamic philosophy that the party has not been able to shake off due to poor turnouts at its events.

While the turnout picked up with the presence of PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday, PAS events have largely been a case of preaching to the converted, so much so that its candidate Yuhaizad has taken it upon himself to tour the constituency with a loudhailer to reach out to as many voters as possible.

Yuhaizad stands a good chance in polling district Chinchin, where he was born and raised, but as Sim observes, the party's hold is faltering elsewhere, particularly in the more urban areas of Merlimau Utara, Pengkalan Samak and Permatang Serai.

Fortunately for Yuhaizad, DAP's message seems to be gaining traction with the Chinese voters, whom they have been coaxing for weeks now, even before the campaign period, through intimate home porch gatherings.

Turnouts at DAP events have also picked up since early in the campaign, with Wednesday's event attracting several hundred.

While DAP claims that they are now confident of about 65 percent of Chinese votes, Mohd Ali claimed that BN now had 55 percent of the community on its side.

This is an increase for BN, which in 2008 was supported by less than half of the community.

If BN increases its support from the Chinese, it will unlikely be due to MCA, which has had little success in attracting the Chinese crowd if compared with the allegedly non-BN linked 1Malaysia NGO.

### **'Previous trends unreliable'**

Sim admits that Pakatan has no indication of how the Indians will vote, with previous trends unreliable.

“In 2008, the trend was influenced by the Hindraf movement. But these issues do not have traction any more in this campaign, even after the recent arrests. Even the Interlok issue does not stick,” he said.

Visits by Malaysiakini to Indian majority areas show that bread and butter issues remain the most crucial for these voters, with many being from the lower middle class.

Mohd Ali (left in picture) claims that the BN has solved all the Indian problems before hand, and that Pakatan is spreading lies by saying that there are Indians who are finding it hard to make ends meet.

“The Indian community is completely behind us, we have 101 percent support,” he said.

If this is true, and BN gets the 55 percent Chinese votes it expects and 65 percent of the Malay votes PAS expects BN to get, then it will come in with a majority of about 3,500.

This is not the 5,000 majority it is aiming for, but it will be a moral victory nevertheless to show that the situation has improved since 2008.

But this is conditional to the BN winning 100 percent of the Indian votes - an unlikely situation - but this is something Mohd Ali may very well be pursuing as the battleground moves to the Indian communities.

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