

Battle royale in the making in Gelang Patah

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By Patrick Sennyah & G Surach, The Malay Mail

A battle royale could be on the cards in the southern Barisan Nasional (BN) fortress with a Gelang Patah face-off between two political heavyweights — Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman and DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang.

In what could become the Waterloo for their political careers, it is speculated that placing Abdul Ghani there could be the only way to check the Opposition's move into the hitherto impenetrable Johor.

It is learned that serious discussions have been taking place among senior Umno leaders at the national and state level on this possibility.

The leaders are also looking at the other scenarios, but top of the list is the one involving Abdul Ghani moving from his Serom state seat to the Gelang Patah parliamentary seat.

The reason for this is Abdul Ghani's immense popularity in Johor among all races and it could sway the Chinese votes in Gelang Patah.

If this battle materialises, it will be reminiscent of Kit Siang's most famous encounter in 1990 when he took on then Penang chief minister Dr Lim Chong Eu at the Padang Kota state seat.

Kit Siang prevailed in that battle and it forced the premature end of Chong Eu's political career.

Asked about this latest development, Kit Siang was evasive on whether he was willing to face Abdul Ghani.

He was unwilling to make any comment until he knew for sure who his opponent will be in Gelang Patah.

MCA biggest casualty

Abdul Ghani did not respond to calls by The Malay Mail for his comments.

If Abdul Ghani is named the BN candidate there, it could force the Pakatan Rakyat strategists back to the drawing board.

However, the Abdul Ghani scenario will also have another drawback with the biggest casualty being the MCA.

This will effectively show that the MCA had lost the Chinese support and only Umno can help

salvage them in the general election.

The Opposition is surely to pick on this point and go to town with it.

Abdul Ghani's political career started when he was first appointed as a senator for two years in 1984. He successfully contested in the 1986 elections and was first made a deputy minister and later a minister.

He became the menteri besar in March 1995 and has held that position since.

With such credentials, he seems to be BN's best bet against Kit Siang's foray into Gelang Patah, which is mainly fuelled by its electoral composition of 54 per cent Chinese and 12 per cent Indians.

However, it must be noted there is a sizable Malay electorate at 33 per cent and with the Malays being staunch BN supporters, the ruling coalition could get a whopping majority. This is evident from the past two elections.

In 2008, PKR's Zaliha Mustafa got 27,779 votes against MCA's Tan Ah Eng, who secured 33,630 votes.

Chinese support

Many may think it was the political tsunami that got Zaliha that many votes but locals say it was because she is a Malay.

This can also be deduced with the 2004 results where Tan got 41,001 votes compared to PKR's Song Sing Kwee 9,335 votes.

The Indian vote is expected to be split and, as a result, not expected to be a major factor.

So it looks like Kit Siang is going to have an unexpected uphill battle in Gelang Patah, if Abdul Ghani decides to contest there.

Johor MCA committee member and Tebrau MP Teng Boon Soon welcomed the idea of Abdul Ghani standing in Gelang Patah although it was not necessary for a heavyweight to be pitted against another heavyweight.

"He has a good track record among the people and he enjoys strong support from the Chinese community in Johor," Teng said.

"The people in Johor will not hesitate to vote for him as he is a hands-on person who knows the people's needs."

Johor state executive councillor and Gambir assemblyperson M Asojan said if Abdul Ghani was to contest in Gelang Patah, he would surely win due to his popularity in the state.

"The Johor people will not want to lose such a leader, just to give the Opposition a foothold in the state."

- The Malay Mail

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