

Will Ali Rustam remain as Malacca CM?

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GE13 WATCH As the country awaits the announcement for nomination day, it still remains uncertain whether Malacca Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam will defend his Bukit Baru state seat and remain as CM, or the historical state will welcome its 10th state chief executive after the 13th general election.

This is the question on the minds of people in the historical state following the 64-year-old Mohd Ali's announcement in January that he may contest in a parliament seat, paving the way for a new CM. He has been the Malacca CM since 1999.

Speculation is rife following Mohd Ali's (left) surprise announcement, as some view that he is trying to "test his market" on whether he will be retained or be chosen for the federal level.

Malacca state legislative assembly speaker Othman Mohamad told Malaysiakini that there are signs that Mohd Ali could remain as the CM.

"Mohd Ali has a good following and track record in Malacca, and Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak may decide not to rock the boat as the incumbent is popular here. Certainly the decision is in Najib's hands on whether Mohd Ali will remain as the CM. There is a strong likelihood he will stay," he said.

If Mohd Ali remains in the Bukit Baru state seat, his likely opponent is former Malacca Hospital deputy director Dr Khalid Kassim who will contest under the PAS ticket.

Othman, who previously served in the Information Department and was a former Special Affairs Department director, said that if Mohd Ali does contest in a parliament seat, then in all likelihood it would be Bukit Katil, as he heads the division.

With this, incumbent Md Sirat Abu, who had served as Mohd Ali's political secretary in 2004, is likely to make way. Bukit Katil is a suburban area outside the Malacca historical city, that also includes the administrative centre Seri Negeri in Ayer Keroh.

CM carrying excess baggage, claims PKR

PKR Youth chief Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin, who hails from Malacca, also sees the likelihood of Mohd Ali contesting in Bukit Katil if he is not defending the Bukit Baru state seat, but he also claimed the chief minister was carrying excess baggage and could be dropped altogether by Najib.

Shamsul (left) said Mohd Ali's track record is not shining, as he was barred by Umno from

contesting in 2009 for the party's deputy presidency following allegations of money politics, which Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin won. This still lingers in the minds of many people.

There are also many allegations on corruption on the CM, said the PKR Youth chief, including possible abuse of power following the much criticised mega-kenduri for his son where state agencies were used, and other allegations.

Shamsul also said that if Mohd Ali, a former deputy transport minister, contests in Bukit Katil, there will be problems as in 2008, where he allegedly played a role in terminating the previous MP, Mohd Ruddin Abdul Ghani.

"There is bound to be some dissension, as Ruddin, who hails from Bukit Baru, has quite a following and support," said Shamsul, a practising lawyer.

The state speaker however denies such suggestions made by the opposition that Ruddin, who was once Mohd Ali's protege and a one-term MP and a former Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry parliamentary secretary, will cause a problem to the present CM.

Ruddin, a former Kolej Universiti Teknikal Kebangsaan Malaysia rector, (now Universiti Technical Malaysia) had contested against Mohd Ali to lead the Bukit Katil Umno division but lost.

"They are on good terms now and it would not be a problem for Mohd Ali to win if he contests in the parliamentary seat as he remains popular," Othman said.

Shamsul, who is also Malacca PKR chief, is slated to contest in the Bukit Katil seat, where in 2008, Khalid Jaafar, who is the present director of the Institute of Policy Research, had contested and lost.

If Mohd Ali contests in the parliamentary seat, it would be an uphill battle for Shamsul to win Bukit Katil. But there is a window of opportunity as the two state seats of Ayer Keroh and Bachang are represented by DAP assemblypersons Khoo Poay Tiong and Lim Jak Wong respectively.

Khalid narrowly lost to Md Sirat by 1,758 votes. Since then the number of new voters had steadily risen by more than 20 percent from 75,777 to 94,331 in 2013.

It remains to be seen whether Shamsul would contest in a state seat in Malacca.

Another place which may see Mohd Ali contesting for a parliament seat should Bukit Katil be a problem is Tangga Batu.

Potential CM candidates

If this is so, then incumbent Tangga Batu MP Idris Haron, an Umno supreme council

member, could well be the most popular candidate to succeed Mohd Ali as CM, if he contests a state seat. Idris is also head of the Umno division there.

The only problem for Idris, who is also Syarikat Perumahan Negara Berhad chairperson, is that he is seen by many as a Mohd Ali loyalist who is also close to Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar.

Othman said that traditionally the candidates to be CM would come from the heads of the Umno divisions.

There are six divisions in Malacca namely Kota Melaka, Bukit Katil, Tangga Batu, Masjid Tanah, Alor Gajah and Jasin.

The most senior figures in the list of division chiefs include Deputy Home Minister Abu Seman Yusop (right), who is Masjid Tanah MP and also state Umno deputy chairperson, while another is Jasin Umno chief and MP Capt (Rtd) Ahmad Hamzah, who is the son-in-law of the ever popular Umno stalwart the late Ghafar Baba.

Other division chiefs are Ghafar Atan (Alor Gajah), who is also a state exco member, and Latif Tamby Chik (Kota Melaka), another exco member and former entrepreneur.

In the past, Malacca chief ministers have mostly come from the Masjid Tanah division (Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik, the late Mohd Zin Abdul Ghani, Adib Adam, and the late Ghani Ali), Jasin (Abu Zahar Isnin), with only Mohd Ali coming from Batu Berendam which now has been divided into Bukit Katil and Tangga Batu.

Previously Masjid Tanah was known as the Alor Gajah division, while the present Alor Gajah division was called Selandar division before a redelineation.

So it remains to be seen whether the CM will come from the Masjid Tanah, Jasin or Bukit Katil divisions.

It could also be an outsider, as suggested by Kota Melaka MP Sim Tong Him, a long-time DAP stalwart.

Some of the names bandied about are As'ari Ibrahim, who is the political secretary for Works Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor.

Opposition's chances

Malacca is traditionally a BN stronghold with the exception of Kota Melaka, which, as the name suggests, is a DAP stronghold where MCA, represented by Wong Nai Chee, had only won in 2004. Wong now works with Najib.

The state has 28 state seats and six parliamentary seats on offer.

According to Sim, the opposition's chances remains good as close to 70 percent of the Chinese there are supporting the opposition and most of them are located in the urban and semi-urban areas.

"What we need is to increase the Malay support for the opposition, and if it can reach 50 percent then the opposition's chances to capture several more state seats are good. Similarly, if the Chinese voters' support can increase to 75 percent or higher when the state assembly is dissolved, then Pakatan will have a good chance," he said.

Shamsul added that PKR, DAP and PAS are working closely and have a good chance in Malacca this time compared to previously due to the new voters there.

The people in Malacca are generally fed-up with Mohd Ali and Umno following allegations of corruption, claimed the PKR Youth chief.

The question will be whether PKR and PAS will make any inroads in 2013, as the two have yet to win any parliament or state seats.

However, for Othman, Mohd Ali is well-liked as he has managed to boost the state as a tourist attraction. He added that by looking after the welfare of the city dwellers, this may result in the DAP losing Kota Melaka again.

"Certainly, Mohd Ali is well-liked in Malacca town and there is a possibility that DAP will not only lose Kota Melaka but also the Kota Laksamana state seat as well where Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng's wife, Betty Chew (right), is the incumbent," he said.

"Chew has been spending more time in Penang rather than looking after her constituency. In addition, Malacca PPP chief Senator Chiu Tiang Chai, who is slated to contest there, has been working hard to regain the seat for BN. Do not be surprised that Kota Laksamana may be lost," he said.

Chew won't be defending Kota Laksamana

On this issue, Sim said Chew had announced at the Pay Fong Chinese secondary school recently that she would not be defending the Kota Laksamana seat.

"We are looking for a potential new candidate to replace her and it could very well be a woman. I do not think it will be a problem for the DAP in defending Kota Laksamana," he said.

In the 2008 general election, Chew, a lawyer who had previously worked with Utusan Malaysia as a journalist, won by a majority of 7,242 votes.

The Kota Melaka MP however, remains uncertain whether the party will re-nominate him to defend the parliament seat. Sim is known to have wide grassroots support and is quite popular in the Kota Melaka area and the state as he has been Bandar Hilir assemblyperson

and opposition leader for several terms.

Now the Malacca DAP is helmed by Kesidang assemblyperson Goh Leong San while Malacca PAS is headed by Adly Zahari, who also heads the Alor Gajah PAS division.

As for Pakatan making in-roads into Malacca, this remains to be seen, unlike their northern neighbours in Negri Sembilan.

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