

15 key seats to watch in GE13

MalaysiaKini.com

April 18, 2013

As with any general election, contests in a handful of seats will be more widely watched than others due to personalities involved or local factors.

This time round, there are many colourful characters and interesting back stories involved in many contests.

Malaysiakini has gone through the available candidacy lists and is particularly interested in the following 15 contests:

Note: Actual candidacies will only be determined on nomination day. Thus candidacy information contained in this report is accurate only as of time of writing.

Putrajaya

Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor (Umno, incumbent) vs Husam Musa (PAS)

It appears that veteran Kelantanese lawmaker Husam Musa (left) is on a suicide mission in Putrajaya to prove a point - That PAS will not back down from a challenge and is serious about its ambitions to form the next federal government.

Standing in his way is Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, the Umno secretary-general who won the seat with a 2,734-vote majority, a record-setting 51 percent of total votes cast, against a minnow from PAS.

Another obstacle is the fact that most of the electorate in this tiny constituency are civil servants, who are notoriously pro-BN and unwilling to bite the hand that feeds.

This time round, the Putrajaya electorate has increased from 6,608 to 15,798, an astounding 160 percent. How this will affect the voting trend will be keenly followed.

Gelang Patah

Abdul Ghani Othman (Umno) vs Lim Kit Siang (DAP)

A classic battle in the making offering plenty of uncertainties between a four-term menteri besar versus one of the longest serving opposition lawmaker.

For Abdul Ghani Othman (left, in photo), he is venturing into uncharted waters because the majority of Gelang Patah constituents are non-Malays, but he has his reputation as MB to back him up.

For Lim Kit Siang, he is facing his biggest opponent since beating Lim Chong Eu (Gerakan) in 1990. He is also contesting in a seat won by BN with a 8,851 majority (15 percent of total votes cast).

Win or lose, one of these two titans may face retirement on May 5.

Sungai Siput

Dr Michael Jayakumar Devaraj (PSM, incumbent) vs SK Devamany (MIC)

After many tries, Dr Michael Jayakumar finally managed to unseat then MIC president S Samy Vellu in 2008. This time round, the duo will still have to do battle as Samy Vellu has been actively campaigning for SK Devamany (right) there for weeks.

MIC is hoping that Samy Vellu's charm will still work among the electorate, as it had during the 11 terms he had held on to the seat.

However, Jayakumar has slowly but surely been expanding his influence in the constituency where he is known for social activism and his medical service.

Pulai

Nur Jazlan Mohamed (Umno, incumbent) vs Salahuddin Ayub (PAS)

After spending several terms as a MP in Kelantan, Salahuddin Ayub (right) is returning to his home state of Johor to lead PAS' charge against Umno in the latter's stronghold.

He will have an uphill task trying to unseat Nur Jazlan Mohamed, a savvy corporate man, who has won the Pulai seat twice with very convincing majorities.

Nur Jazlan is Urban Development Authority (UDA) Holdings chairperson, as well as the son of the late former information minister and one-time Umno secretary-general Mohamed Rahmat.

Pasir Mas

Ibrahim Ali (IND, incumbent) vs Nik Mohd Abduh Nik Mat (PAS) vs Che Johan Che Pa (Umno)

Despite his fervent support for BN and Umno over the past five years, Ibrahim Ali (below) was not fielded in Pasir Mas under the BN ticket, unlike his Perkasa compatriot and fellow BN-friendly Independent MP Zulkifli Noordin.

History has shown that Ibrahim had won in Pasir Mas in three out of six contests, with three different parties (Umno in 1986, Semangat 46 in 1990 and PAS in 2008), making his ability chances of winning hard to predict.

The last time he stood as an Independent was in 2004, in which he raked in only 15 percent of the total votes cast.

His PAS opponent, Nik Mohd Abduh, is the son of PAS spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

By virtue of being the son of the highly respected and influential Nik Aziz, Nik Mohd Abduh is considered a favourite to win the seat.

Shah Alam

Abdul Khalid Samad (PAS, incumbent) vs Zulkifli Noordin (BN)

Perhaps one of the biggest surprise for GE13 is BN's decision to field the highly volatile Zulkifli in Shah Alam.

Zulkifli (right) favourite topic is Islam and his efforts to champion his religion had often caused discomfort among non-Muslims.

In contrast, Khalid Samad portrays himself as a moderate yet pious man and is among the rare PAS leaders who spoke to non-Muslims in their respective houses of worship.

Although Zulkifli has promised not to harp on religion during his campaign, old habits tend to die hard and religious rhetorics will likely take centre stage in urban Shah Alam.

Pandan

Ong Tee Keat (IND, incumbent) vs Gary Lim (MCA) vs Rafizi Ramli (PKR)

Ong Tee Keat may not have announced his candidacy as an Independent yet, but we are assuming he will for this article. If he is indeed defending his seat, the battle for Pandan would definitely be a must watch.

Should Ong (right) decide to burn bridges with BN and contest as an Independent, he should be regarded as a force to reckon with because he has been very visible in the constituency, unlike Gary Lim and PKR's director of strategy Rafizi Ramli.

Voters now have a tough choice of having a very hands-on Ong to represent them in parliament, or vote based on party lines, making this one of the more volatile seats to watch.

It's a risky move and some Independents have managed to pull through. However, there has also been an incumbent who have lost his deposit once he didn't have party backing, as in the case of two-term Padungan state assemblyperson Dominique Ng.

Arau

Shahidan Kassim (Umno) vs Haron Din (PAS)

PAS syura council deputy head Haron Din (left) has never won a seat in parliament, but in 2008 he came very close – he was just 300 votes shy of victory (1 percent of total votes cast) – when he faced off against a lesser known opponent.

This time round, the firebrand cleric will be taking on a former menteri besar in the form of Shahidan Kassim, thus a battle of the heavyweights awaits.

Both candidates are familiar faces to Arau constituents - Shahidan was the MP for Arau between 1986 and 1995 and thus results are expected to be very close, just like in 2008.

Shahidan has swapped seats with his brother Ismail, the Arau incumbent.

The latter will instead be contesting in Tambun Tulang, a state seat located within the Arau constituency and which was won by Shahidan in 2008.

Keningau

Joseph Pairin Kitingan (PBS, incumbent) vs Jeffrey Gapari Kitingan (Star) vs Stephen Sandor (PKR)

For the second time in a row, two brothers will be doing battle in the general election. Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Jeffrey Gapari Kitingan (below) have been on opposing sides of the political divide for close to two decades, culminating in this battle for supremacy over Keningau, which is a Kadazan-majority seat.

Between the two, Pairin is deeper rooted in Keningau politically, as he had been the Tambunan state assemblyperson (a state seat in Keningau parliamentary constituency) since 1976.

However, Jeffrey came close to winning in 2008. He lost the Bingkor state assembly seat (within Keningau) by just 171 votes in a four-cornered fight and lost by a respectable 4,264 votes (17 percent of total votes cast) to Pairin for the Keningau parliamentary seat.

A third piece in the Keningau contest is Stephen Sandor, the Sabah PKR information chief and Keningau PKR division chief. His influence remains to be seen.

Kluang

Hou Kok Chung (MCA, incumbent) vs Liew Chin Tong (DAP)

A teacher versus pupil battle is shaping up in Kluang between Hou Kok Chung, who once taught Liew Chin Tong (left) during the early 2000s at New Era College.

Hou, an academician-turned-politician, is a local boy while Liew, a well-read policy expert, is from Selangor but who won a parliamentary seat in Penang in 2008.

Expect a battle of wits between the two intellects.

Tuaran

Wilfred Bumburing (PKR, incumbent) vs Wilfred Madius Tangau (Upko)

Two seasoned politicians who share the same name are vying for Tuaran, another significant seat for the Kadazun community. Wilfred Bumburing (left) is a former Upko member while Wilfred Madius Tangau is a veteran Upko politician who was also a deputy federal minister once.

Both Wilfreds are Tuaran locals and appear to have the same soft spoken demeanour. Expect the campaign message to be focused more on party lines rather than personalities.

Penampang

Bernard Giluk Dompok (Upko, incumbent) vs Ignatius Darell Leiking (PKR)

Along with Pairin and Joseph Kurup, Bernard Giluk Dompok (right) is regarded as one of the 'Big Three' in Kadazan politics. He has alternated between being the MP for Penampang and Ranau since 1990.

Out to unseat him is another Penampang local in the form of Ignatius Darell Leiking, a young lawyer and scion of former state assistant cabinet member Marcel Leiking who was then with Berjaya.

PKR believes that this is a winnable seat because its last candidate came close. Should Star field a candidate as well, a three-corner fight would almost guarantee BN a victory.

Bentong

Liow Tiong Lai (MCA, incumbent) vs Wong Tack (DAP)

Malacca-born Liow Tiong Lai is expected to face the toughest contest of his career in trying to fend off local boy Wong Tack, who is best known for spearheading the campaign against the Lynas rare earth refinery.

On the national level, Liow has had some missteps but it is unlikely to bring him demerit points in the sleepy hallow of Raub, which looks to him for more bread and butter matters, as noted through his campaign advertisements.

However, his opponent (right, in photo) is an increasingly popular figure throughout Pahang and is the most recognisable face in the anti-Lynas movement, which led to some people dubbing him 'The Green Lantern'.

Observers are keen to see whether Liow, who became the health minister after 2008, will break the "hell ministry" curse and prevail against the green crusader.

Lembah Pantai

Nurul Izzah Anwar (PKR, incumbent) vs Raja Nong Chik Zainal Abidin (Umno)

A class war of sorts is taking place in Lembah Pantai between Nurul Izzah Anwar, who is well liked by the middle-class constituents for her articulate nature, and Raja

Nong Chik Zainal Abidin, who has channeled most of his efforts and Federal Territories Ministry funds towards the working class constituents.

Nurul Izzah is in a precarious position because she won in 2008 with a majority of only 2,895 votes (7 percent of total votes cast). Will her charm and intellect alone be enough to withstand the onslaught of BN money and machinery?

Miri

Sebastian Ting (SUPP) vs Dr Michael Teo (PKR) vs Lim Su Kien (DAP)

It is highly possible that PKR and DAP will both field a candidate in Miri, a seat which based on the 2011 state elections results, would likely give either party a slim victory in a straight fight.

A complicated arrangement took place in 2011, over state seats in exchange for parliamentary seats between the two parties, but negotiations have broken down.

Between PKR's Dr Michael Teo and DAP's Lim Su Kien, both are deeply rooted in Miri but the former is believed to be more popular, in part due to his medical practice.

As for SUPP candidate Sebastian Ting (left), this seasoned politician is no pushover.

He is a trained lawyer and also the political secretary to incumbent Minister of Energy, Green Technology and Water Peter Chin.

Should the situation between DAP and PKR not change within the next 24 hours, expect Ting to cruise to an easy victory.

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