

Gains for both sides after first half of campaign

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GE13 WATCH PERAK Nine days into the election campaign, the two rival coalitions are taking stock of their chances.

While Pakatan Rakyat has the upper hand in state seats, the BN's strength lies in defending its parliamentary seats.

narrow majority in perak 310308Should the status remain up to Sunday, the historic 'political tsunami' of 2008 will be repeated - Pakatan will rule the state with a simple majority, but will not win more parliamentary seats to contribute to the march to Putrajaya.

Pakatan had formed the state government in 2008 with 31 state seats, but its component parties were only able to win 11 of the 24 parliamentary seats.

Perak clearly remains front-line state for both coalitions. Top guns such as BN chairperson Najib Abdul Razak, his deputy Muhyiddin Yassin, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang have all campaigned in the state over the past week.

After five years of hard work, PAS is eyeing five key state seats - Pengkalan Baru, Manjoi, Sungai Rapat, Trong and Selama.

Manjoi and Sungai Rapat are located in the Kinta Valley, while the others are close to the west coast of Perak and therefore near the PAS stronghold in the Kerian district.

Perak Pakatan needs to draw 43 percent of the Malay vote, 75 percent of the Chinese vote and 40 percent of the Indian vote to regain the state with a simple majority.

NONEIt's almost safe to say that PAS will capture Pengkalan Baru. The Malay rural seat was secured by Umno's five-term assemblyperson Hamdi Abu Bakar with a majority of only 14 votes five years ago. He is not defending the seat.

PAS is fielding Perak Pakatan secretary Dr Khairudin Abdul Malek (right) to challenge a new face from BN - Abdul Manap Hashim - in this seat that falls under the Beruas parliamentary seat.

The reason for PAS' failure to win the Pengkalan Baru seat previously has been attributed to the lack of Chinese support.

After PAS and DAP joined hands under the Pakatan umbrella, however, Khairudin has been getting assistance from incumbent Beruas MP, Ngeh Koo Ham, to dispel Chinese fears about implementation of the Islamic state and hudud law.

At least 65 percent of the community is now said to back Pakatan. Should Khairudin also get 40 percent of the new Malay votes, he will win.

Similarly, it is the Chinese voters in Manjoi and Sungai Rapat who will decide the election outcome in these Malay urban constituencies. Chinese voters make up 31 percent and 22 percent of the electorate respectively.

PAS can win both seats if it can convince 40 percent of the new Malay voters and 70 percent of the Chinese voters to vote for its candidates.

'Parachute' candidates

The issue of 'parachute' candidates may be the main cause of BN's defeat in the state, with Perak BN fielding 60 percent of new faces.

NONE Some incumbent representatives who were not reappointed have told Malaysiakini that they are unhappy with the candidates selected by Perak BN chief Zambry Abd Kadir (left), claiming that he had made decisions without consulting grassroots leaders.

Pakatan too will feel the consequences of a similar decision in Jalong, Teja and Behrang.

The DAP had enjoyed a fantastic election result in 2007 with a clean swept of 18 state seats in Perak.

This time around, the last-minute announcement of the candidacy list excluded the incumbent Jalong assemblyperson Leong Mee Meng, who was replaced by Perak DAP Socialist Youth assistant secretary Loh Sze Yee.

Leong had secured a majority of more than 5,000 votes five years ago and has remained a popular in the local community. Not surprisingly, there is disgruntlement that she has been left out.

A group of her supporters held a protest in front of the Perak DAP headquarters right after the announcement, and the issue has yet to be settled.

TWO days ago, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng was in Jalong to campaign for Loh, but according to the local residents, none of the committee members of the seven branches in Jalong turned up.

Loh is the chairperson of Jelapang's first branch, while his election campaign team members are all from Jelapang - none are from Jalong. As a consequence, some locals said they may vote for the BN's Liew Yew Aw.

In Teja, PKR candidate Chang Lih Kang is facing his old opponent Yew Sau Kham of BN. Chang had won by 175 votes in 2008, securing only 21 percent of the Malay vote.

The racial breakdown of the state seat has changed slightly since then. The number of Orang Asli voters, who are seen as firm BN supporters, has doubled from 800 to 1,651.

Chang will now need 30 percent of the Malay vote, 70 percent of the Chinese vote, 50 percent of the Indian vote and 10 percent of the Orang Asli vote.

PKR has placed Brig-Gen (Rtd) Hadi Abdul Khattab in Behrang, against Perak Wanita Umno chief Rusnah Kassim, in a four-corner fight. The constituency has many Felda settlement areas.

Win some, lose some

Although Pakatan may win five state seats, they lose three others. It could govern Perak with at least 31 out of 59 seats.

This, however, would leave the coalition in the same precarious position as in 2008 when it became vulnerable to a takeover.

Sacked Wanita Umno deputy chief Kamilia Ibrahim, who is contesting the Kuala Kangsar parliamentary seat as an Independent, may split the vote of the BN candidate Wan Mohammad Khair-Il Anuar Wan Ahmad.

This would be of advantage to PAS candidate Khalil Idham Lim's bid to take the BN stronghold.

Pakatan is also confident of winning the Larut parliamentary seat, where former

CID chief Mohd Fauzi Sa'ari is its candidate.

However, there are problems in Bagan Serai. According to an Utusan Malaysia report, PKR candidate Dr Muhammad Nur Manuty is being boycotted by his party's campaign machinery.

NONEA source confirmed that the local grassroots leaders are not happy with Muhammad Nur (right), who is viewed as a 'parachute' candidate. Although the Perak PKR chief has a religious background as a former Abim president, voters would prefer to see a Banjar being fielded as the candidate.

After being defeated in Sungai Siput in 2008, former MIC president S Samy Vellu has returned to give full support for party vice-president SK Devamany. He faces incumbent Dr Michael Jeyaraj of PSM, who is contesting on a PKR ticket.

Neither have any illusions about the tough three-corner contest. With the impact of the Hindraf factor having dissipated, Indian voters - comprising 21 percent of the electorate - will decide their fate.

NONEPKR has targeted a win in the Lumut parliamentary seat, but the BN brought in Mahathir (right) and Muhyiddin to campaign there within days of one another, to strengthen support among the navy personnel, as well as to woo the 9,000 new voters in the Pasir Panjang state seat.

By naming Perak MCA secretary Tan Chin Meng as the candidate for Gopeng, the BN is seeking to recapture the seat once held by MCA secretary-general Ting Chew Peh and which it lost to PKR's Lee Boon Chye in 2008.

As the campaign enters the final stretch, the window of opportunity is closing for candidates to make their final pitch in securing votes.