

## **No-show by BN candidate, Sungai Acheh debate fails**

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**By Susan Loone**

PENANG PKR's Sungai Acheh candidate Badrul Hisham Shaharin is disappointed that his BN opponent had failed to attend a debate with him on Sunday.

Badrul, better known as Chegubard, said Mahmud Zakaria failed to turn up at the event although Mahmud continues to 'slander' him during the election campaign which ends on the eve of May 5, polling day.

NONE "A day before the debate, banners were put up around Sungai Acheh asking the public not to attend the event, alleging that it was a provocation," Chegubard (right in photo) said at a press conference yesterday.

"Text messages have been sent around, too, to say that the BN candidate had been captured by Chegubard," he claimed.

"This reflects the fear of the BN candidate to express his views about his policies, manifesto and where Sungai Acheh would be heading," he added.

"His absence is also an indication that he is worried that his failure as an assemblyperson for Sungai Acheh since 2008 will be exposed," he stressed.

Chegubard said Mahmud had accepted the challenge to a debate and had verbally agreed to attend the session.

He said he does not wish to disappoint the Sungai Acheh voters and would be giving Mahmud another chance to determine the time, date and place of the debate, where he would attend to speak about his manifesto so that people can judge the offer for themselves.

"The people would definitely choose the best offer for the future of Sungai Acheh as the southern corridor for Penang," he said.

In his 10-point agenda, Chegubard has an ambitious plan for the constituency, which includes turning Sungai Acheh into an agriculture hub, setting-up a free tuition and vocational training centre, job fairs to provide hundreds of jobs for the locals, a mobile service centre for the rural areas and a racial unity and youth development centre, including programmes to empower women.

During an interview with Malaysiakini, Mahmud had expressed his disinterest in the debate, saying his voters would judge him by his previous performance as the incumbent.

'No fear of losing the seat'

He said he had no fear of losing the seat, and if he had any, concealed it very carefully, with talk of being able to retain the seat which he won by a mere majority of 250 against PKR in 2008.

He said BN's chances of victory in Sungai Acheh were brighter this time due to the conflict between PAS and PKR, where both parties had filed their nomination forms on April 20.

PAS later dropped out when the party's central leadership announced that the seat would be contested by PKR, while the latter gave way to its ally in three other seats in Labuan, Johor and Terengganu.

NONEMahmud (left) criticised Pakatan for being an "insincere alliance" (perikatan yang tak jujur) which was only interested in winning elections.

"They came together only to seek opportunities but breaks up when they fight over seats," he said when met on his campaign trail in Kampung Batas Pinang, where he holds small ceramahs, though mostly with party supporters.

He said Chegubard and the PAS candidate Yusni Mat Piah, who was fielded earlier, were not locals and "people hardly knew them here".

However, he observed that Chegubard was a little more well-known due to the national issues he has been raising, while Yusni appears to be known only to certain quarters.

But being the incumbent, Mahmud said he had contributed much to the Sungai Acheh community since 2008.

"I have managed to build a mosque, a building for the police, a religious school, and many more costing millions," he said after meeting the kampung folks.

"Even though I was part of the opposition, I managed to do all these with the help of the federal government," he added.

"If I win, I will help to build a bridge across Sungai Krian to link Kampung Tanjung

Berembang to the Nibong Tebal township, which the folks here, especially the fishermen, have been asking for," he said.

Sungai Aceh - a rural agriculture based seat - under the Nibong Tebal constituency, has 15,592 voters, 66 percent Malays, 26 percent Chinese and eight percent Indians.

Both candidates are banking on the 40 percent youth voters, who will eventually decide the future direction of the constituency.

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