

All running smoothly for BN to retain Kota Belud

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By Aidila Razak

SABAH Nordin Kanuh's eldest child just finished secondary school but the self-employed man cannot afford to send him to university.

"We don't have the money, so I told him to enrol in Form Six first," Nordin, a 45-year-old father of three, said.

NONEHe is probably among parents whom Pakatan Rakyat are targeting in its promise to make tertiary education free for all Malaysians. However, this promise is not winning him over.

For Nordin (right), who lives in Kampung Kinasaraban in Kota Belud, some 60km from Kota Kinabalu, other concerns, such as running water, are more pressing.

"The BN government had just started a project so that we can get running water...

"If the opposition party wins in my area, then I believe the project will be stopped. How much longer will we then have to wait for running water?" he asked.

Nordin will vote in the state constituency of Kadamaian, one of three in the parliamentary seats under Kota Belud where Sabah BN secretary and incumbent Abdul Rahman Dahlan is taking on four others, including PKR greenhorn Isnaraissah Munirah Majilis.

NONEIn Kota Belud town on Labour Day to attend the Kaamatan or harvest festival, he said he hopes the people in Kadamaian would think the same way as he does.

"But I don't know. The opposition is getting stronger there. Everywhere in Kadamaian I keep hearing 'Ini Kalilah', but I am 'Tatap'," he said, referring to the BN campaign slogan 'Tatap BN'.

The Pakatan slogan - Ini Kalilah - has been adopted by all parties wanting to unseat BN, including Star, PKR and even the independent candidate contesting Kadamaian against incumbent Herbert Lagadan of the PBS.

Birthplace of Sabah Umno

The other seats under Kota Belud - Usukan and Tempasuk - are contested by Umno

strongmen, former state Speaker Salleh Said Keruak and Musbah Jamli.

Both these candidates are much respected, with the incumbent Salleh having long ties with the area. The community hall, for example, is named after his father.

NONE Salleh (right) is the second Umno assembly person for Usukan, which has been held by the BN since 1994, before which it was for long held by Sabah Umno founding member Mustapha Harun.

In his speech officiating the Kaamatan festival, which Kota Belud hosted this year, Sabah BN chief Musa Aman said Usukan is especially special as it is the birthplace of Sabah Umno.

"I remember campaigning for Tun Mustapha then, and the people of Kota Belud promising me that they will support us. They kept their promise, so we will keep our promises to Kota Belud," Musa said.

The latest promise is a RM300 million oil and gas hub in Usukan, which will also accommodate fishermen and provide an estimated 1,000 jobs for the local youths.

It is difficult to imagine what such a mega project can do for a small town like Kota Belud, where the hippest place to hang out is the KFC outlet that is located near the only two petrol stations there.

But the promise of employment is one that Usukan voter Azlinah Nordin, 34, likes to hear. Her vote, however, will go to Salleh for more basic reasons.

"We have a new school building now. The road to our village used to just be gravel, but now it is tarred," Azlinah said, beaming.

"Also, thanks to the government's minimum wage policy, the young people who work in supermarkets here can get the same pay as those in the peninsula."

'The government is good to us'

Up to a few years ago, Azlinah (below, left), who has two young children, was working in Johor, where her salary was better.

NONE She said the RM800 basic wage that youngsters get today is a remarkable improvement, compared with the RM300 she used to get when she first started working in the 1990s.

In a glossy 47-page 'Buletin Sejahtera Kota Belud' distributed during the Kaamatan celebration, the BN lists its contributions to the people - from a new bridge to free eyeglasses and a RM200 million project to improve rice yield in the region lined with padi fields.

"The government has done a lot for us here, so there really is no reason to change."

Unlike neighbouring Tuaran or Kota Marudu - both shaky seats for the BN - no one met by Malaysiakini in Kota Belud spoke of things other than bread-and-butter issues.

There was also no mention of illegal migrants, a common topic raised by those in Tuaran and even in the more interior Matunggong in the Kota Marudu constituency, when the people were asked how they will decide on their vote.

There was no mention of Lahad Datu, or of the need for re-issuance of identity cards for bona fide Sabahans, or even native land rights.

Nor did the local people discuss about who would be more fit to be prime minister, or corruption, or even where hudud could be implemented without constitutional amendment.

"Yes, I heard about these claims of corruption, but are they substantiated? Anyhow, I don't really care if the leaders are corrupt, as long as we can all live in peace," one man said.

As Malaysians votes on Sunday in an election that could set the stage for a two-party democracy in the country, daily bread, water supply and the quality of their roads will be topmost in the minds of the Kota Belud voters.

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