

Hot seats in GE13 ablaze with attention

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GE13 WATCH For BN, the 13th general election is a 'do or die' battle 'to continue its more than 50 years reign over Malaysia. For Pakatan, this is its closest look ever at a chance to rule the nation.

Both sides are running their machinery at fever pitch, doing their best and sometimes their worst, to further their aims.

But some seats do stand out as the hottest or at least most watched for fame or infamy.

Sparks that fly from the campaigns as opposing sides clash, set them ablaze in news and popular chatter, online, in print and in coffee shop banter.

Pulai

This 47 percent Malay majority Johor parliamentary seat is a BN stronghold in Malaysia's southernmost state.

It's held by incumbent Nur Jazlan Mohamed of Umno for two terms since 2004 who defeated his PAS opponents with huge majorities both times. The traditional Malay villages prevalent here are bastions of Malay-based party Umno.

walkout suhakam 120606 salahuddin ayobWhat makes sparks fly this time round, is that PAS is fielding its Johor-born vice-president Salahuddin Ayob (left), in a daring attempt, along with other Pakatan big guns, to make inroads into the Umno heartland.

Salahuddin who is also contesting in the state seat of Nusajaya, the state administrative capital - another Umno stronghold - is tipped to be menteri besar, should Pakatan take over.

Campaigning has been stormy as Nur Jazlan continues to be at the crest of confidence with the traditional sway his party holds over the electorate.

As for Salahuddin, he is campaigning hard to fuel anger towards a botched industrial development in southern Johor, which saw traditional land seized and ancestral graves dug up, to the ire of the villagers.

Bentong

The sleepy town of Bentong is the parliamentary seat of incumbent MP and caretaker Health Minister, Malacca-born Liow Tiong Lai.

It's a small closely-knit community which regards the MCA leader with reverence and awe. Indeed Liow won the seat in 1999 and defended it successfully against Pakatan in 2004 and 2008, winning five figure majorities.

NONE However a battle royale has exploded here, when DAP plucked Bentong son and environmental activist Wong Tack (right), from his green crusade against the Lynas rare-earth plant in nearby Kuantan, to stand against Liow.

Fresh from denying that the Lynas rare-earth plant is as dangerous as Wong claimed, Liow and the 'green fighter' are facing off for more than just votes for the seat.

It's also a battle of wills over the surge of environmental activism in Malaysia, against what some say is unrestrained development, harmful to the land, to the people and future generations.

This seat will be the first symbolic clash between the environmental movement and big government.

Keningau

They say that politics makes for strange bedfellows, but perhaps it makes for stranger battles too, as this brother-against-brother fight in the Sabah parliamentary seat of Keningau would attest to.

kitingan project ic 250107 jeffery kitingan Incumbent MP Joseph Pairin Kitingan from PBS will be reprising his sibling rivalry with brother Jeffrey Kitingan (left) of the Star party, continuing their 2008 tussle when Joseph bloodied Jeffrey's nose with a 4,264 majority, successfully defending the seat he also won in 2004.

Despite his once rebellious streak which saw him going against the BN, Joseph, a Catholic is now fighting for the coalition and is the Huguan Siou (paramount leader) of the Kadazan Dusun community.

Reports on the ground however put the bulk of the 43,710 voters staunchly behind Jeffrey this time around, with mostly Star flags adorning the 70 percent non-Muslim

bumiputera, 18 percent Muslim bumiputera and 10 percent Chinese constituency.

The third wheel in the race, PKR's Stephen Sandor, is caught in the battle between the brothers on their home ground and is hardly more than an also-ran.

Arau

Third time's the charm says some, and perhaps it may be so for PAS deputy spiritual advisor Haron Din who is contesting this Perlis parliamentary seat after losing in 2004 and 2008 to Umno candidates.

He lost in 2008 by a mere 300 votes which brightens chances at winning the seat at his third crack.

shahidan kassimFacing him is former Menteri Besar and one-time Arau MP Shahidan Kassim (right) of Umno who is looking to return to Parliament after falling out of favour. He was sidelined from the MB post to sit in the state assembly's BN back bench.

More interesting perhaps is the battle within the battle between a PAS ulama and a young Umno religious preacher who is contesting the state seat of Sanglang inside the Arau constituency.

Fathul Bari of Umno, of the Malay party's ulama movement, is vying for support as Haron also canvasses the same area, which saw the PAS ulama duke it out with the Umno religious preacher.

Putrajaya

The motherlode of all seats in GE13, the federal administrative capital of Putrajaya is not just a parliamentary constituency, it is a symbol of what it means to govern Malaysia.

More than just a collection of impressive buildings it is the true seat of power. Winning it is a way for either side to say, that they have 'won' Putrajaya.

Whichever way the vote swings, this constituency will spark more interest than most any.

NONEPopulated mostly with civil servants, this 93 percent Malay majority seat is marked as a sure win for incumbent Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor (right) of Umno, though Pakatan would like to disagree and is fielding Kelantan administration

stalwart Husam Musa of PAS to challenge the outcome.

Despite BN's confidence, studies on shifts of Malay support toward Pakatan and the huge numbers that attended its ceramah by its bigwigs has rung alarm bells.

And both sides continue to strike while the campaigning period was still hot, as a cavalcade of BN heavyweights jumped in, and more caustic sparks were loosed.

Kuantan

The site of the much opposed Lynas rare-earth plant, the tussle for the Pahang parliamentary seat of Kuantan has become another proxy fight between the environmental movement and the government.

While 'green fighter' Wong Tack led his green campaign against caretaker Health Minister Liow Tiong Lai in Bentong, incumbent Fuziah Salleh of PKR has also adopted the environment as the cause she champions. Sparks over the Lynas issue and may win her support among disgruntled Kuantan residents.

Facing her here is Umno's Mohamed Suffian Awang. The Malay party slid in to take the seat from MCA whose candidate Fu Ah Kiow won in 2004 but later lost to Fuziah in 2008.

What may be a factor is that the MCA is not happy to lose this 62 percent Malay majority seat to Umno. Indeed some in the Chinese party had stood hand in hand with Wong and the green movement in their protest of Lynas. Here, sabotage is a real concern.

Wangsa Maju

The Kuala Lumpur parliamentary seat is the constituency of infamous incumbent Wee Choo Keong, who was one of the first to leave PKR to become a BN-friendly Independent, after winning the seat with a slim majority of 150 in 2008.

NONECandidates facing off in the Malay majority seat this time are PKR's Dr Tan Kee Kwong (right) against BN candidate and local Umno division chief Mohd Shafei Abdullah.

A former deputy minister from BN's Gerakan before joining PKR, Tan had campaigned against the recent Felda listing and other land issues, while Mohd Shafei is caretaker prime minister Mohd Najib Abdul Razak's political secretary, fielded as candidate in a move to shore up support for the PM inside BN and Umno.

Sparks flew and continue to fly as Tan has to contend with Pakatan supporters angry at Wee's betrayal, while Mohd Shafei faces vocal resentment within MCA who had to surrender the seat to Umno.

Bandar Tun Razak

The parliamentary seat of first time MP and incumbent Abdul Khalid Ibrahim from PKR, who won the seat in 2008, the seat garnered attention when locals complained that Khalid, who is also caretaker Selangor menteri besar, was rarely on the ground.

NONEHe has a service centre there but not much of him is seen, reports say, when interviewing locals from the 91,136-voter seat which comprises of 52 percent Malays, 37 percent Chinese and nine percent Indians.

Smelling blood, a circling BN has sent in MCA's Tan Kok Eng (left), son of the former deputy home minister Tan Chai Ho whom Khalid defeated to take the seat, to finish him.

Joining the race are two Bandar Tun Razak Umno divisional leaders, Mohamad Sukeri Abdul Samat and Mokhtar Salahudin, who were sacked from the party for running against BN candidate Kok Eng,

Their 'rebellion' may hide a silver lining as it may split the Malay votes, thus reducing Khalid's support.

If this is the case, then Kok Eng, may just end Khalid's hopes of a second term as MP.

Gelang Patah

Although this is one of the shakier seats in the BN stronghold of Johor, it will still be an uphill task to demolish BN's 8,851-vote (14.6 percent) majority.

NONENonetheless, this appears to be Pakatan Rakyat's chosen battleground in its bid to breach BN's fortress, and leading the charge is none other than DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang.

Defending this otherwise unremarkable seat is Johor caretaker menteri besar and state BN chief Abdul Ghani Othman - a popular Umno moderate who has helmed the state over the past 18 years.

He works quietly close to the ground, while DAP as held mega-ceramah drawing crowds up to 70,000 people.

As far as clashes of Titans go, few can rival what would unfold on May 5 in this Chinese-majority seat.

Lembah Pantai

In 2008, the incumbent MP and PKR vice president Nurul Izzah Anwar felled a giant in the Kuala Lumpur parliamentary seat in her polls debut, the then Women's Minister Sharizat Abdul Jalil. She won with a majority of 2,895 votes (7.0 percent), and now faces another federal minister.

NONEHer opponent in this mixed seat is caretaker Federal Territories and Urban Wellbeing Minister Raja Nong Chik Zainal Abidin (left).

Both have spent the past few years working on the ground, especially with the urban poor living in public housing.

However, Nong Chik has an edge here as his ministry controls the Kuala Lumpur City Hall, even as netizens mock him as a "drain inspector" when a photo of his campaign banner went viral on Facebook, where he claims credit for various drain upgrades and construction projects.

Saratok

Both BN chief Najib Abdul Razak and PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim had campaigned in this Sarawak parliamentary seat over the past weekend, drawing crowds of 1,500 and 1,000 respectively.

Similar crowd sizes notwithstanding however, BN had won this seat with an 8,706-vote (52.9 percent) majority. On the other hand, the incumbent MP Jelaing Mersat is not defending his seat, paving way for William Mawan Ikon to contest on BN's ticket.

His challenger is PKR's Ali Biju, who is virtually unknown in Sarawak politics until he unexpectedly defeated Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) deputy president Peter Nyarok Entrie in the 2011 state election.

Should he succeeds in repeating his feat at parliamentary level, PKR would have its first Sarawakian bumiputra in the Dewan Rakyat.

Kota Raja

Of Malaysia's 222 parliamentary seats, Kota Raja in Selangor has the distinction of having Indian Malaysians forming up 29 percent of its electorate - the highest in the country.

NONEThis must have been one of the factors on Hindraf de facto leader P Uthayakumar's (left) mind when he decided to contest there as an independent.

On the defensive is PAS' Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud, who had won the seat with a comfortable majority of 20,751 (36.2 percent) votes in the previous general election and has the distinction of being the first woman to make a bid for PAS vice-presidency, albeit unsuccessful.

By percentage, she enjoys the largest majority vote among Selangor-based MPs, but she now faces a four-corner fight that is likely to chip away at her majority.

Besides Uthayakumar, her opponents are Murugesan Sinnandaver from MIC and Independent candidate Azman Idrus.

Seremban

Political observers are keeping an eye on Negri Sembilan to see if it becomes the next BN state to fall to Pakatan. As it is, the opposition already holds 15 of the state assembly's 36 seats, and needs just four more to form the state government.

If anything, massive Pakatan Rakyat rallies numbering about 25,000 people have only bolstered such hopes.

However even for a state as small as Negri Sembilan, it remains to be seen if rallies in the state capitol would translate into votes in marginal seats outside the capitol where it is most needed.

Weighing down Pakatan Rakyat's momentum is the fact that the incumbent Seremban MP John Fernandez (DAP) who had won the seat with a decent 3,948-vote majority (6.1 percent) is defending the seat as an independent.

Meanwhile, in the state seat of Ampangan within Seremban, several PKR operations centres have closed down due to dissatisfaction over candidate selection.

Kuala Kangsar

The long-serving local MP Rafidah Aziz (Umno) is not defending her Perak parliamentary seat here, which she won with a 1,458-vote (7.0 percent) majority.

NONEVying to replace her is the outgoing Bukit Chandan assemblyperson Wan Khairil Anuar Wan Ahmad from Umno and outgoing Titi Serong assemblyperson Khalil Idham Lim Abdullah from PAS.

However, Kamilia Ibrahim is also contesting in Kuala Kangsar as an independent in this three-corner fight. She was Wanita Umno's influential number two leader until her move to contest led to her being summarily sacked from the party, and is bound to split Umno's votes.

Pasir Mas

This Kelantan parliamentary seat was supposed to see a three-corner fight until the BN's intended candidate Che Johan Che Pa bizarrely turned up at the nomination centre with his papers in order, but did not submit them and instead called for BN supporters to back the Independent candidate - Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali.

NONEIbrahim had won the seat with a 8,991-vote (18.2 percent) majority under the PAS ticket, and will be going up against PAS' Nik Mohamad Abduh Nik Abdul Aziz (left), who is also the son of PAS spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

This would be Ibrahim's seventh bid for the Pasir Mas seat, of which three were successful. He had contested here before under Umno, Semangat 46, PAS, and Independent tickets before.

In his last bid as an Independent in 2004, he fought a three-corner battle against Umno and PAS candidates and only managed to win 15 percent of the ballots cast.

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