

'Youth tsunami' buoys PAS in Terengganu

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By Hazlan Zakaria

ANALYSIS PAS, which is just two seats shy of a simple majority in the Terengganu state assembly, is crediting a surge in support from 'enlightened' youths for its better than expected showing in the east coast state.

jom bersih venue change 010208 syed azman"This shows an awakening among youths in the struggle for change. They are well-informed, turning to alternative media and the social networking sites for accurate information," the Islamic party's assistant secretary-general Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi (right) told Malaysiakini.

Pakatan won 15 state seats in last week's GE13, an increase of seven seats from the eight it took in 2008. It also captured four parliamentary seats, taking three more than the one it won in Terengganu in GE12.

BN won 17 state seats, only two seats more than Pakatan.

The eight state seats from 2008 that Pakatan maintained are traditional PAS strongholds, including Wakaf Mempelam, Batu Burok, Ru Rendang and Manir.

The seven additional seats it won last Sunday are seats Umno won on slim majorities in 2008, including Tepuh, Teluk Pasu, Rantau Abang and Paka. Their fall to PAS helped swing victories in the parliamentary seats of Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu and Dungun.

Syed Azman, who contested and won the Batu Burok state seat, argued that these 'enlightened' youths were tired of the scandals and peccadilloes of the BN-led state government under the tenure of Umno's Ahmad Said as menteri besar.

NONECollapsed buildings, sky-high state budgets, uneven development, seizure of Malay land as well as the final straw of the demolition of the historic Pasar Payang in the heart of the state capital turned the youths against Umno and MCA, he said.

Another factor, Syed Azman said, was the return of outside voters, the 'sons and daughters' of Terengganu working in other states, in huge numbers to vote. Many of them, are the self-same well-informed youths.

Terengganu has 22.1 percent of new voters - one of the highest among the states

in Malaysia.

As for the much talked about pro-Pakatan "Chinese tsunami", Syed Azman said Terengganu only had only two state seats with a significant Chinese population.

In the Bandar state seat, which has 36.21 percent Chinese voters, the PKR candidate and former Indera Mahkota MP Azan Ismail reversed the BN majority from 1,142 votes in 2008 to 2,159 this time.

In Cukai, another important state seat with a substantial number of Chinese voters (13.98 percent), PAS managed to grab the seat that it lost by 769 votes in 2008 with a 2,446-vote majority.

Umno infighting a 'minimal factor'

Asked if the infighting that erupted in Terengganu Umno over the selection of candidates was a factor in PAS' successful foray, he dismissed it as a "minimal factor".

In the Setiu parliamentary constituency for example, Syed Azman said, infighting within Umno was rife but PAS was not able to make an inroad there.

The Setiu parliamentary seat saw some internal problems in the local Umno machinery and was visited by Umno president Najib Abdul Razak at the last minute, in the tail end of his GE13 campaign, to shore up support for Umno in problematic areas.

There are reports of local division office bearers and members engaging in sabotage, in protest against Najib's "winnable" candidates list.

NONE Fifteen new faces made up the BN list of candidates in Terengganu. Five were re-nominated, but to different areas and 20 were incumbents for the 32 state and eight parliamentary seats in the state.

Syed Azman said that most of the constituencies that Pakatan lost are rural Malay-majority seats, with mostly undeveloped villages and Felda settlements and far from the reach of the alternative media, where the voters have been recipients of "blatantly open political bribery".

These are located in the state seats considered Umno strongholds, including Bukit Besi, Permaisuri and Langkap, with the parliamentary seats being Kemaman, Hulu Terengganu and Besut.

"These are people who depend on government subsidies. Their fear factor is worries over losing subsidies and government handouts," Syed Azman said.

Despite retaining Terengganu, the BN and Umno could not be too comfortable with their two-seat majority in Terengganu as there was talk of "anything can take place" in the near term to upset the BN apple cart.

PAS won Terengganu in 1999 and held it for one term before losing it at the 2004 general election.

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