

Q&A: 'We must prepare for the worst'
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Sitting in the new corporate-style PAS headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, party veep and Kelantan leader Husam Musa appears solemn as he tells malaysiakini that PAS may lose Kelantan in the next elections.

Below are excerpts from the 90-minute interview:

Malaysiakini: How is PAS' chances of retaining Kelantan in the next general election?

Husam: This coming elections is very crucial and critical for us. Under former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad's administration, there is no malpractice inside the polling station. There is no manipulation of the electoral rolls.

In the 2004 general election however, in Terengganu and Selangor, you can detect manipulation of the electoral rolls itself. This is the main core of the electoral system but it is corrupt. We don't know what is going to happen in the next elections.

The electoral roll is only released to us on nomination day but you can't do anything such as protesting if you find any irregularity. If this practice is not changed, we are very worried.

You are asking the Election Commission (EC) to release the electoral rolls earlier?

Yes, say three months before Parliament is dissolved.

Isn't that an on-going exercise as EC had recently released and displayed the latest electoral rolls? However, we do understand during the Ijok by-election, the opposition has alleged that the electoral roll used is different from the one displayed earlier.

The principal electoral roll is only released to contesting parties on nomination day. We have different electoral rolls (the supplementary electoral roll) from the principal electoral roll, although both copies are from the EC. In Ijok and Batu Talam, it was different too. According to the Election Act, the EC can't change the principal electoral roll but they have sent notices to people asking them whether they are still staying at the same address.

When we asked the EC the purpose of doing this, they can't give a satisfactory answer. For instance in Kelantan, they sent the notices to voters in several seats like Rantau Panjang or Anak Bukit in Kedah which were won by PAS.

Is manipulation possible with a different electoral roll?

The number of voters can remain the same. Let's say there are 15,000 voters in a constituency - they can remove PAS supporters from the electoral roll and replace them with new voters or

'designed voters'. This happened in Selangor during the last general election where 128,000 voters were unable to vote although they had voted in the 1999 general election. When they found out about it on polling day, they can't do anything.

In Terengganu, in the 1999 election, PAS or (opposition front) Barisan Alternatif obtained 180,000 votes and this was reduced by 9,000 votes in the 2004 general election, which became 171,000 votes. With this 9,000 votes, there was no way BA (Barisan Alternatif) could lose the state.

On the other hand, BN obtained an increase of 93,000 votes. Where did these votes come from?

The element of multiple voting was very strong in 2004, apart from the registration of outsiders from Terengganu as voters after the BN's defeat in 1999.

You are suggesting that there is not much difference in terms of PAS votes but that new voters come in and they are voting BN?

Yes, and there was a sudden increase in voters' turnout for instance in Terengganu - 25 percent in voter turnout. That is extraordinary and in some seats, the turnout went beyond 90 percent. There is something wrong somewhere and here comes the issue of multiple voting.

Any (huge) increase in the turnout, we can relate to the 'designed' voters. It's not easy for those apathetic towards politics to suddenly turn up and vote in the elections. There are price hikes going on - petrol, toll, etc. There is no way for the people to like BN more, no way. You need something to explain this strange phenomenon.

EC can argue it is a 'hot' election and people are going out to vote.

We are demanding at least two things from the EC - use the indelible ink to prevent multiple voting or with the modern gadget, we can use thumb scan.

Can you substantiate your claim because Umno has also accused PAS of doing the same thing like relocating voters to Kelantan?

If we can use the indelible ink when both parties are accused of doing the same thing, then both can't manipulate the system. We were the one who requested but they have refused - what are they scared of?

Indelible ink is archaic, according to the EC.

We can use the scan machine.

They have already accepted the suggestion for transparent ballot boxes.

Only the boxes are transparent, not (the electoral process) on nomination and polling day. That is not significant enough.

Are you saying the incompetency of the EC in conducting a free and fair election is going to affect your party's chances?

We can face BN but if we can't eliminate the two possible problems, namely manipulation of electoral rolls and multiple voting, we do have handicaps.

Even with these handicaps, how do you see your chances?

This is a real threat to us, not just imagination, it has been proven in Terengganu, Selangor in the last general election and the recent Ijok by-election. In Ijok, you can see the swing to the opposition was 13 percent, this has been the same trend in the previous five by-elections.

Even in Batu Talam, if you add up the votes obtained by the independent candidate together with the spoilt votes and those who didn't turn up to vote, there were about 13 percent of voters who did not vote for BN even though the opposition did not field a candidate.

The 13 percent swing is a big threat to BN but because they spun it and said they had a bigger margin, these 'undercurrent factors' remain undercurrent.

What are you going to do?

We have to fight for a free and fair election first. We may not be able to get it but we have to fight for it. At the very least, the people at large understand the issue.

You are saying this - the two electoral irregularities - is a recent trend?

Yes, this did not happen during Mahathir's time, no matter how bad it was under Mahathir, this trend only started in the 2004 general election.

Putting aside the possible problems, how is PAS' chances?

Based on the 13 percent swing, we can win Kelantan comfortably.

On the two possible problems you raised, what if nothing's going to change?

We will have to hang our heads on polling day (grins). There is still a need for us to participate in the elections especially in Kelantan, otherwise there will be a walkover.

But I am still quite optimistic about the EC on the two issues - to use the indelible ink and prevent manipulation of electoral roll because there is no excuse for them not to accept.

If the two issues are not resolved...

We're finished, nobody can survive... nobody can...

You are saying that PAS will lose?

Nobody can survive.

Granted this is the possible scenario, EC is unlikely to give in to the opposition's request...

We need to prepare for the worst. Our hopes rely on the 'feeling' of the federal leaders, if they feel that they don't want to have a PAS (state) government in their political equation, so habis-lah (we're finished).

In Terengganu, if we can't eliminate the extra voters from outside the state, I don't think we have any chance, frankly speaking. The anger among the people is increasing but with the thousands of 'designed voters' behind them, you can't do anything.

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