



Galas puts Ku Li in an awkward position
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NEWS ANALYSIS While the nation waits with bated breath for the Election Commission's announcement on the Galas by-election, many pundits have been talking about the 'Ku Li factor', saying that victory will largely depend on what Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah would do.

Razaleigh, the nine-term Gua Musang MP and at one point, a serious contender to be Prime Minister, has been a prized catch of sorts in the run-up to the campaign of the 12th by-election since the 2008 general election.

In a battle historically between Umno and PAS in the state seat of Galas, which together with two Umno-held state seats lie within the parliamentary seat of Gua Musang, the contest here is as good as a gauge of popularity for the Kelantan prince (he is the uncle of the Raja Permaisuri).

And Razaleigh is very popular.

The only time that Galas was won by any other party than Umno, apart from the last general election when PAS' Che Hashim Sulaima triumphed with a 646-vote majority, were during the general elections in 1990 and 1995.

It was Semangat 46 - an Umno splinter party headed by Razaleigh himself - that had won the state seat then, before it went back into the BN fold in the 2004 general elections.

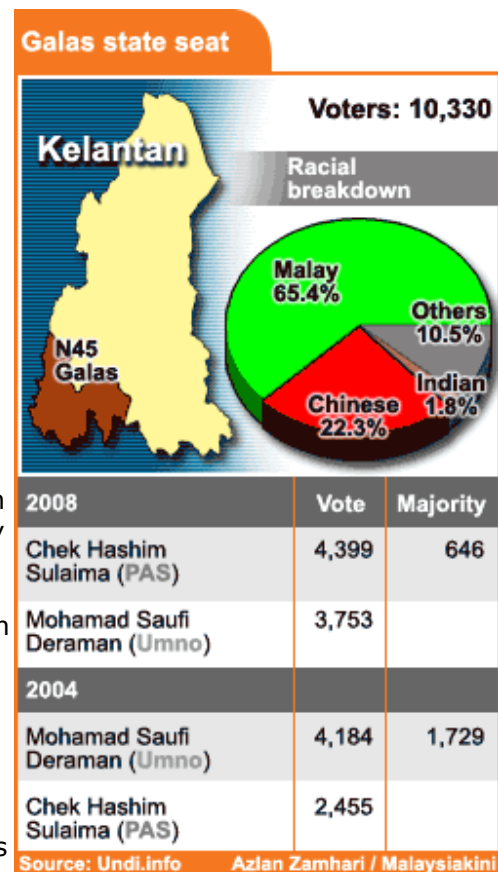
But just yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin flashed his trump card - he appointed Razaleigh to head the election machinery for BN, a post normally held by the DPM.

Many have now said that it will be an awkward position for Razaleigh - also the Gua Musang division chief - since the former finance minister has been more than critical of his party and the BN-led federal government of late.

He had raised eyebrows lately by publicly throwing his support behind the PAS-led Kelantan government in its bid to claim oil royalty payments from the federal government.

He has even offered to testify in the state government's lawsuit filed against Petronas last month, which speaks volume since he had drafted the Petroleum Development Act 1974.

And now it is down to the wire on whether PAS will be able to retain the seat considering





that they now have to go head-to-head with someone who almost has the stature of a folk hero.

'Little difference if Ku Li heads machinery'

But UCSI University lecturer from the faculty of economics and policy science Ong Kian Ming is

unimpressed, saying that Ku Li's appointment is likely not to leave a dent in the PAS campaign.

"While PAS would have the upper hand if Razaleigh were to go on a 'silent revolt' against his party by not going the extra mile in campaigning, I don't think Ku Li heading the machinery will change much.

"He is more effective drawing away votes from BN than he is at bringing them in," he said.

At the moment, while Razaleigh himself has been relatively silent on his appointment, Muhyiddin (*right*) had said that the veteran politician himself had agreed to heading the campaign operations.

But it would appear that the 73-year-old is still taking things at his own pace, and not even inconveniencing himself by cutting his Europe trip short where he is due to visit his alma mater in Ireland soon.

An aide has confirmed that Razaleigh has made no indications of returning earlier, and will only arrive in the country on Oct 9.

Even then, Ong admitted that it was the best strategic move for BN to appoint Razaleigh.

Oil royalties vs party loyalties

While Umno can flex its muscles in keeping the elder statesmen to toe the party line, it may ultimately be a win-win situation for both Razaleigh and the party, which has seen a love-hate relationship at times.

"If (Razaleigh) is smart, he could get BN or Umno to agree to review their stand on the oil royalties issue. He may very well set a list of conditions for the party.

"At the same time, it could give Muhyiddin some cover in case BN loses," he said.

Ong also said that with the appointment, PAS could in the end have a field day attacking Razaleigh himself over the issue of oil royalties.

"I'm quite sure that PAS will launch salvos at any opportunity available. And if Razaleigh doesn't play his cards right, he could end up losing credibility very fast," he said.

Still, all is not lost with Razaleigh's appointment.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political analyst Agus Yusoff said that while it is still too early to tell if Ku Li will be a factor, there is still time for Razaleigh himself if he wants to

hold back on support for his own party.

"It will still depend on how much autonomy he is given in running the show. If he is just an 'empty director', he can still boycott if he wants to," said Agus.

Chinese voters to continue being kingmakers

At a glance, the battle for the Galas state seat may be game over for PAS if Ku Li is the sole gauge. But it's not.

In the constituency where the Chinese voters stand at 22.3 percent, they still hold tremendous voting power if the Malay electorate were to be split down the middle.

Although Galas is technically a rural seat by any standards, the Chinese typically vote based on national issues, swayed by what they read in the Chinese press.

In the last general election, it is said that the biggest reason Galas fell to PAS was because of the swing in the Chinese votes after years of frustration with the federal government.

"And with what's happening lately, especially on the way Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak handles racism issues, there could be an even bigger support by the Chinese voters for Pakatan," said Ong.

In the meantime, the jury is still out on whether the Orang Asli voters, who stand at 10.5 percent, will swing to Pakatan, despite having been traditional BN supporters.

Ong said that the Orang Asli will sway especially after the federal government's heavy-handedness in handling the recent church issue and if PKR is mobilised to win the hearts of the Orang Asli by explaining their native-friendly policies in the Selangor government.



"But I think these will be non-issues to the Orang Asli as well as Umno. Ku Li is still a very familiar face with them and I think they will vote for BN because of him," said Agus.