

Galas: Pro-Ku Li T-shirt emerges
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Umno and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah are different factors in the run-up to the Galas by-election.

The extent to which the one is running in the other's slipstream or writing personal agendas can only be deduced after the campaign is over.

Gleanings, however, can be had early. The appearance of T-shirts sporting the slogan 'AMBO NOK PARTI KU LI' ('I support Ku Li's party' in the Kelantanese dialect) has been noticed in Galas the last few days.

No prizes for guessing the identity of the supplier.

If the T-shirts become ubiquitous by the time of polling on Nov 4, it would mean that Razaleigh's appeal in the state ward that comes under the Gua Musang parliamentary constituency, which he has represented since 1969, has returned to levels of old.

Otherwise, it can be inferred that Kelantan's most famous political brand has waned in popularity.

The famed Kelantanese penchant for uniting behind a favourite son with national appeal can be counted on to override partisan political loyalties when a well-regarded individual is headed for a higher perch.

An offer Ku Li cannot refuse

Umno had successfully enticed dissident Razaleigh to head their campaign for the seat on the premise that co-optation is better than confrontation. What better to do in Galas than to leverage on the appeal of a favourite son.

Razaleigh could not refuse the offer because he aspires to restore a derelict Umno to its former glory. What better way to do that than to lead a polls campaign in parts regarded as his bailiwick.

Mutual need rather than ideological affinity drives this dynamic of cooperation, with each allowing the other enough latitude to strike differing - though not conflicting - poses.

True, Razeleigh has maintained that his becoming BN campaign chair did not mean he has shifted from his stance of support for the payment of oil royalty to Kelantan on offshore extractions.

The Tengku can support but the federal government is the one that does the paying. Thus far they have said they will not pay, not directly to the state government.

Thus Galas may mark the beginning of a new era of tolerance for intra-party or coalition diversity, a departure from monolithic past practices.

Score another point for the changes presaged by the political tsunami of March 2008.

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