



**Batu Sapi: Who stands to lose the most?**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**October 26, 2010**

NEWS ANALYSIS The stakes are clearly high for the big three contesting the Batu Sapi parliamentary by-election on Nov 4.

It will be an interesting tussle between BN, local opposition front SAPP and the Sabah Pakatan Rakyat as this will be the first real contest between the three parties.

But more significant is the impact of the outcome, not just on voting trends in a state that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak calls BN's "fixed deposit", but also on the fate of key personalities on both sides of the political divide.

Possibly the biggest risk that has been taken is SAPP president Yong Teck Lee's decision to stand in the by-election.

This is the first time his party is contesting against the BN, since he pulled it out of the ruling coalition as a show of no-confidence in the leadership of then premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2008.

Yong and SAPP have since continuously promoted themselves statewide as the best choice for a better Sabah, reviving the 'Sabah for Sabahans' and Borneonisation campaigns in a concerted effort to convince voters of the party's viability as administrators.

But Yong's decision to contest the seat may end up being a double-edged sword that could make or break the former chief minister's political career.

By virtue of being party president, he gains an edge in terms of stature as a candidate, which is no less helped by his long experience as a grassroots leader and his hands-on work ethic.

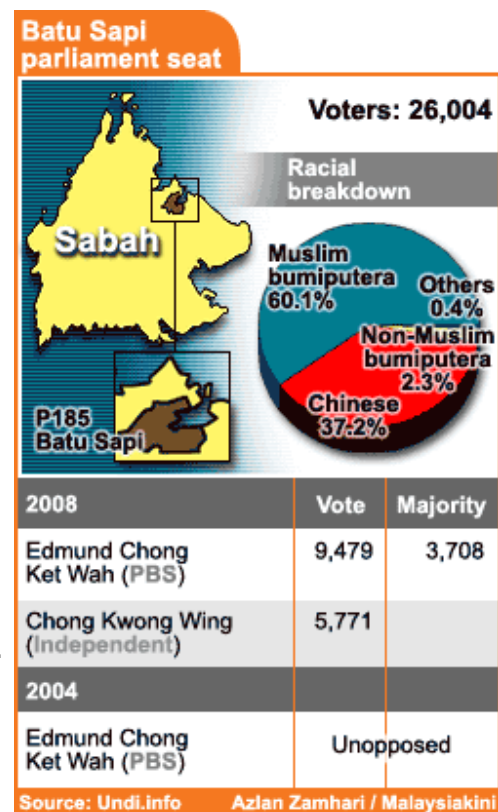
Should he win, it may well be a glowing endorsement of his party's march to take over Sabah from the BN come the next general election.

By the same token, his position as president also means that all liabilities are loaded on to this by-election, as support for a party is only as good as support for its president.

A loss for Yong in Batu Sapi could signal the death knell for SAPP's ambition of taking control of the state.

Musa's future on the line?

For the BN, the impact of the Batu Sapi polls could spark some upheaval in the state hierarchy, with the pressure - real or perceived - bearing down on chief minister and state Umno liaison chief Musa Aman to deliver.





While their candidate of choice, Linda Tsen Thau Lin, is a PBS member, the results of the by-election will reflect on whether the BN, and inevitably Musa himself, continue to be popular with Sabahans.

And with pervasive rumours in Putrajaya of Najib's 'dislike' of Musa (*right*), who had aligned himself closely with Abdullah in previous years, it looks like Musa is intent on proving he still has a handle on the

state.

Musa's decision to personally take charge of the election machinery only lends credence to the perception that he is under pressure to defend the seat, or end up packing his bags to vacate the chief minister's office.

He even made special mention of Sekong assemblyperson Samsudin Yahya when announcing Tsen's candidacy, indicating that he is banking on Samsudin's popularity with the grassroots to boost support from bumiputera voters, who make up some 60 percent of the electorate.

#### Positives for Sabah Pakatan

The Sabah Pakatan seems to have the least to lose in this by-election, which will be the first time the three opposition parties - PKR, DAP and PAS - are contesting under the same banner in the state.

The worst that could happen for Sabah Pakatan, should its candidate - former PKR state chief Ansari Abdullah (*left*) lose - is that it will be viewed as irrelevant in the political scheme of things in Sabah.

The reality they currently face is not too far from that possibility, particularly due to the constant and ugly infighting in Sabah PKR, with a state leadership tussle that went so far as to boot out party vice-president Azmin Ali as state chief.

Sabah Pakatan, however, is probably the only side that can claim any benefit from this by-election, regardless of its outcome.

Should Ansari lose, it can still glean some positives from the outing as it would have helped give the opposition coalition much-needed exposure to voters, while delivering its goals and aspirations to the grassroots.

A victory would mean it is officially a real threat to the state BN.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/146408>

