

Will young voters be deciding factor in Batu Sapi?
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The legendary three-legged Batu Sapi, a rock formation beside the river, near Sandakan, is one of the popular tourist attractions in Sandakan.

But, not many tourists are eager to catch a glimpse of the beauty of Batu Sapi although it stands majestically at the estuary surrounded by mangrove and the fast encroaching Sandakan town as compared to the Orang Utan Sanctuary Centre in Sepilok.

In what is seen as a change of fortune, scores of people including national leaders from all over the country are expected to converge at this scenic area, possibly at least for the next nine days for the Batu Sapi parliamentary by-election on Nov 4.

The by-election will see BN taking on local-based opposition Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) and PKR.

The contest for the Batu Sapi parliamentary seat is seen as a battlefield for political survival for the respective parties or a litmus test of support before the next general elections.

Some political analysts even dubbed this by-election as "a Sailang (all out) battle", particularly for SAPP which placed high hopes on its president Yong Teck Lee to spring a surprise in wresting the seat from the BN.

Acknowledging the importance of young voters, Sabah Umno Youth head Azman Ruslan said based on the political trend currently, young adults are paying close attention to by-election, particularly after the so-called political tsunami in the 2008 general election.

"A majority of them seem to be eager to vote in this by-election," he told Bernama, adding that this would be the first by-election, after the last general election, in Sabah, dubbed as the fixed deposit for the BN.

Immediately after the nomination yesterday which saw a three-cornered fight between BN, SAPP and PKR, the campaigning session has turned into a full gear.

In firing the first salvo, Sabah Umno Youth today implied that the Pakatan Rakyat's unclear and inconsistent 'hala tuju' (policies) would be a liability to the nation's delicate multi-racial society, especially to the future well-being of the young and future generations.

Azman said it was therefore very important for the people, especially the young generation, to support BN's struggle through the 1Malaysia, 'people first, performance now' concept, which would be more beneficial to all Malaysians.

"In this connection, I believe young voters in the Batu Sapi parliamentary by-election will not be easily hoodwinked by the opposition's empty promises.

"The opposition can say anything, including a promise to fight for Sabah's political autonomy, but in the end I believe people will see the logic (of the argument).

SAPP 'opportunist' party

"If you just look around Sandakan town nowadays, you will notice that a lot of educational facilities and academic institutions have surfaced, not to mention an ongoing plan to create a new Sandakan education hub.

"These (educational) facilities are solid proof of the BN government's seriousness in empowering the youths through human resource development," he said.

Azman, who is in Sandakan to lead the BN Youth in campaigning for the BN candidate in the by-election also outlined several factors why people, especially young voters in the constituency, should support BN.

These included the BN's genuine efforts in accommodating and engaging youths in educational, social and political programmes, or even involving them in discussions on policy matters, he said.

"In fact, the BN government is fully committed to create a generation of dynamic and progressive youths in the 21st century," he said.

Azman also branded SAPP, a Sabah-based multiracial party, which is also contesting in the by-election, as an 'opportunist' party which was trying to exploit 'isu-isu lapuk' (old issues).

BN is banking on Linda Tsen Thau Lin of PBS to deliver the goods while SAPP and PKR placed their hopes on its president 'taiko' Yong, who is a former Sabah chief minister, and PKR Tuaran chief and prominent lawyer Ansari Abdullah respectively.

The Batu Sapi parliamentary seat fell vacant following the death of its incumbent and two-term MP Edmund Chong following an accident on Oct 9.

In the March 2008 general election, the BN candidate polled 9,479 votes while Dr Chung Kong Wing (independent) had 5,771 votes. Chong won with a 3,708-vote majority.

Batu Sapi has 25,582 voters comprising 24,047 ordinary voters and 1,535 postal voters.

A total of 15,099 or 59.02 per cent of the voters are Muslim bumiputeras, 689 non-Muslim bumiputeras (2.69 per cent), 9,737 Chinese (38.06 per cent) and others, 57 (0.22 per cent).

- Bernama

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