

Language problem for Linda Tsen?
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The PBS election machinery finally hit the campaign trail today, as rumours persist of a language problem facing their candidate for the Batu Sapi by-election, Linda Tsen Thau Lin.

The state BN component party started their campaign a day later than rivals SAPP and Sabah Pakatan Rakyat, but continues to shield Tsen (*left*), the widow of Batu Sapi MP Edmund Chong Ket Wah, from the glare of the media.

Tsen, a professional pianist, has faced criticism from detractors and opponents since she was announced as BN's candidate of choice, for allegedly having a poor command of Malay.

PBS president Joseph Pairin Kitingan has since denied the rumours in local papers, saying she has a good command of the language.

But if her interaction with the media this morning is to be a gauge, then the BN may be facing a challenging campaign going into bumiputera areas.

When asked by an RTM journalist for a sound bite in Malay, she paused and after some coaxing by senior PBS leaders who said it was "okay to mix English and Bahasa", she proceeded to answer the question fully in English.

Tsen however told journalists during the same interview that she will go down to the ground and meet bumiputera voters, who make up some 60 percent of the 25,000-odd voting base in Batu Sapi.

Speaking to the media for less than five minutes during her first of many walkabouts scheduled for this nine-day campaign, she said she was confident of retaining the seat for BN because she has "the heart to serve" and carry on what her late husband had done for his constituents.

"I'll go down to the ground to show that I can serve the people," she said while on a walkabout in Bandar Ramai-Ramai, her first of several scheduled over the nine-day campaign period.

Still grieving

Despite the jibes against her for being "weak" and not able to speak Malay, what affects her the most however is what she leaves unsaid.

Tsen seems to have steeled herself in taking on the challenge of winning this by-election, but her face cannot hide her grief in losing her husband only a little over two weeks earlier.

Asked in Mandarin if her decision to contest the seat is taxing her emotionally, she admitted that she is facing a tornado of emotions as she fronts BN's bid to retain Batu Sapi for a fourth straight time since it was created in 1999.

"Of course (it's hard), because on one hand I miss him a lot, but on the other hand, I have to stand strong because I still have four children... they said, 'Mum, we will support whatever you want to do'," she said as a phalanx of PBS leaders, particularly vice-president Dr Yee Moh Chai, interjected to end the interview for Tsen to continue with her walkabout.

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