

Kelantan broods ahead of polls
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Fathi Aris Omar

analysis MCPX It's hard to read PAS vice-president Husam Musa who invariably appears relaxed in front the media, even during a general election that could well cost his party dearly.

At a recent press conference, his face was inscrutable and his answers were cryptic, revealing nothing the fury of campaigning between PAS and Barisan Nasional for the prize catch of Kelantan.

husam musa pas interview 170507Speaking to Malaysiakini afterwards, he was asked to compare the differences between the current and earlier campaigns.

"The mood of the voters is the same as in 1999 (when the reformasi campaign was conceived)," he said, but noted that Kelantan tends to unite when leaders from other states attempt to intervene.

"Although (the Kelantanese may support) different parties, they will unite under the name of Kelantan. This is the tradition of Kelantan," he said.

"I see that Pak Lah (BN head Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) and (Umno Youth deputy head) Khairy (Jamaluddin) want to trample Tok Guru (PAS spiritual head Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat). I reckon that the people of Kelantan don't want Tok Guru to be trampled."

Kota Bharu PAS candidate Wan Abdul Rahim Wan Abdullah echoed his views during a ceramah, saying: "We don't want to be ruled by an outsider. No son of Kelantan wants outsiders to teach us in our own land."

If the BN has heard this, it obviously does not believe it - its supporters will be among the 60,000 Anak Kelantan who are expected to make their way home from around the country to cast their ballots on Saturday.

A state civil servant pointed out that PAS, as the party which has controlled the state for 18 years, should have prepared better by ensuring that new voters have been registered.

"Transferring voters is a difficult process as it involves procedures under the Election Commission," he said.

2004 breakdown of seats in kelantanIn all, there are 735,500 registered voters in the east coast state, which has been led by PAS since 1990.

But the inroads made by BN over the years left the just-dissolved state assembly hanging by a thread in PAS' favour - it held 23 seats to BN's 22.

Some blame this on complacency within PAS, which provided BN the opening it needed to make an impact. This development has also thrown wide open the claim that 'outsiders' are not welcome as administrators of the state.

Reticent voters

It isn't just Husam who is playing his cards close to his chest. Voters in the state are not revealing much either about which way they will vote, unless they are supporters of a particular party.

Many neutral voters commented that Kelantan is "brooding and unpredictable".

"Not many (privately-owned) vehicles display party stickers," observed a bank officer.

His friend, who works in a private firm, said this is because voters have already made up their mind.

pas posters in kota bharu 240208It was different in 1999 when flags and party logos were prominent on vehicles, on the roads of Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu and even the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur.

This time around, party symbols were mainly on vehicles operated by party workers and a small number of supporters.

The 'poster war' remains impressive in all seats, especially in urban and semi-urban areas where the battle is expected to its most vigorous. Over the past week, the PAS machinery has been moved up a couple of gears, putting up more posters and flags.

What is different many of the party workers are jeans-clad youth in their 20s, unlike in the past when they would have been those wearing traditional Malay outfits or party T-shirts.

Said a party leader who requested anonymity: "Campaigning is more intense now because many members - from top to bottom - fear losing the state to BN."

At the same time, BN's promises of development projects do not have 100 percent appeal for the proud Kelantanese.

kelantan 020308 big bn poster"The development issues raised by BN, which has placed them in the hardcore poor category, are seen as an insult." said a contractor and a chalet owner in Kota Bharu.

"Kelantan people don't reject development, but they want balanced development. There is no point of instant development that leads to debts being incurred."

From the findings of research conducted by PAS, it is learnt that the party expects to win 20 seats including 10 'Grade A' constituencies.

A source said, however, that BN will retain seats in strongholds like Gua Musang, Jeli and Kuala Krai.

PAS leaders are not taking anything for granted, not in the face of such BN slogans as Kelantan Baru, Kelantan Maju and 18 (tahun) lamo doh weh!