

The hot states - what to expect
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Malaysiakini takes a look at several states where the contest for the state seats promises lots of fireworks. Which are the seats expected to change hands and why? MCPX

Penang

penang the seats to watchOver the past two weeks, DAP has mounted a tough campaign in its bid to deny the BN ruling coalition two-thirds majority. The opposition party, along with its ally PKR, have been organising surprisingly huge rallies.

Gerakan, the ruling party in BN, has been hampered by its inability to name its candidate to take over from outgoing chief minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon. Infighting among the different factions within the party has also affected the campaign.

Nevertheless, while the mood among the Chinese majority in the state, along with the Indian minority is decidedly ugly, BN is expected to be voted back into power.

However, it is likely to lose a few seats and the latest ground reports indicated that up to 10 seats are at risk. This will not be enough for the opposition to deny BN two-thirds majority, which is 14 seats out of a total of 40 seats.

The seats at risk are: Perai (MIC), Bagan Dalam (MIC), Bagan Jermal (MCA), Padang Lalang (MCA), Bukit Tambun (Gerakan), Air Putih (MCA), Batu Lanchang (Gerakan), Paya Terubong (MCA), Komtar (MCA), Kebun Bunga (MCA) and Penanti (Umno).

Terengganu

The oil rich east coast state has witnessed a bitter struggle between its former ruler PAS and present ruler BN/Umno over the past two weeks.

In the 2004 elections, BN recaptured the Malay-majority seat after losing it to PAS for one term in 1999.

Over the past four years, Umno has managed to strengthen its position by providing more development while the Islamic opposition PAS continues to use religious-based good governance as its rallying point.

At present, Umno controls 32 state seats while PAS has four. However, ground reports indicate that there are several seats with slim majorities which could swing either way.

The seats to watch are: Tepuh (Umno), Teluk Pasu (Umno), Bukit Tunggal (Umno), Bukit Payung (Umno), Alur Limbat (Umno), Manir (PAS), Sura (Umno) and Batu Buruk (PAS).

If there is a slight swing to PAS, it could pick up an additional six state seats.

Kelantan

Kelantan is definitely on the 'hot' list given that PAS is hanging on to its once impregnable fortress with a single seat majority.

2004 breakdown of seats in Kelantan PAS controls 23 seats while Umno - following the last general election and a subsequent by-election - has 22. Umno's electoral success in the 2004 polls was attributed to the Abdullah Ahmad Badawi factor.

However, ground reports indicate that this same factor may now turn the tide in favour of PAS again, especially with the latter portraying BN as an 'outsider aiming to colonise the last Islamic frontier'.

Some Kelantanese have grown disillusioned with Abdullah's leadership and BN's alleged failure to deliver its promises. The constant depiction of Kelantan languishing in poverty has also angered the locals.

BN, on the other hand, is trying to lure the voters with the promise of development and socio-economic upliftment.

At least 20 seats have wafer-thin majorities, with one - Kemuning - being won by PAS with a two-vote majority.

The seats to watch are: Bukit Panau (PAS), Pulau Chondong (PAS), Temangan (PAS), Gaal (PAS), Kota Lama (PAS), Kemuning (PAS), Chetok (PAS), Limbongan (PAS), Kelaboran (PAS), Kadok (PAS), Kemahang (PAS), Mengkebang (Umno), Melor (Umno), Selising (Umno), Pengkalan Pasir (Umno), Manek Urai (Umno), Semerak (Umno), Pengkalan Kubor (Umno), Tendong (Umno) and Air Lanas (Umno).

Latest ground report indicate that it will be a close fight with both sides confident of winning.

Selangor

This is another state poised for a bitter battle. For one, Selangor can be considered as the birthplace of Hindraf due to the spate of temple demolitions which riled up the community. Selangor has the second highest Indian population in the country.

Apart from protest votes swinging in favour of the opposition from the Indian community, it is also reported that Umno Selangor is plagued by internal problems and this could affect the Malay votes. There are 21 state seats here.

The reason for this is the many new faces introduced in this elections. Supporters of the old candidates are reportedly unhappy with the move and this could see a large chunk of 'Umno protest votes'.

Ground reports also indicate that Chinese voters in the state are unhappy with the leadership of Menteri Besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo who is seen to be very pro-Malay. There is also concern that the state is undergoing an Islamisation process under his stewardship.

The seats at risk are Meru (Umno), Gombak Setia (Umno), Cempaka (Umno), Batu Caves (MIC), Kinrara (MCA), Damansara Utama (MCA) and Pandamaran (MCA).

Perak

Perak, which has the highest number of Indians in the country, is also expected to witness the repercussions of the Hindraf wave. There are 24 state seats up for grabs.

This is the homestate of MIC president S Samy Vellu who will be defending the Sungai Siput parliamentary seat for the ninth term.

Here too, Umno is said to be facing a certain degree of internal problems in relation to the candidates chosen.

Ground reports also indicate that the Chinese voters may cast protest ballots in certain constituencies at the expense of MCA and Gerakan.

The Chinese voters are said to be upset with issues concerning corruption, the high crime rate and the lack of good governance.

The seats to watch are: Canning (MCA), Pasir Tinji (MCA), Buntong (MCA), Bercham (MCA), Jalong (Gerakan), Menglembu (MCA), Jelapang (MCA), Kamunting (Umno), Gunung Semanggol (Umno) and Changkat Jong (Umno).

It is expected that the opposition will add a few more seats to the two it won in 2004, putting an end to Khir Toyo's dream of 'zero opposition' in the state.

Kedah

This Malay-majority state is also expected to witness a heated battle between Umno and PAS in this elections.

Umno Kedah is reportedly besieged with internal problems over the national Umno leadership's choice of candidates for this polls. Observers note that the supporters of those left out could work to undermine the new candidates' chances by backing the opposition.

PAS has also made significant inroads in about six state seats which they had lost by small majorities in 2004. Kedah has a total of 36 state seats.

The opposition party is confident that if in 2004, they were able to put up a strong performance despite the feel-good factor surrounding Abdullah, this time around, with the advent of numerous issues such as price hikes and so forth, they expect to win these seats.

PKR, on the other hand, is hoping to make an impact in Lunas, which has a high number of non-Malay voters, and Derga, a Chinese majority seat.

The seats at risk are Ayer Hitam (Umno), Kota Siputeh (Umno), Kupang (Umno), Kuala Ketil (Umno), Jeneri (Umno), Kuala Nerang (Umno), Lunas (MIC) and Derga (Gerakan).

Perlis

Opposition PAS has expressed confidence in capturing the country's smallest state, which in recent weeks proved to be big in trouble in terms of unity in the state Umno.

PAS is banking on this infighting as well as on the hottest topic among voters - high prices of consumer goods and services.

In the 2004 general election, PAS only managed to win in the Sanglang state seat. This time, it is contesting 12 of the 15 state seats.

Umno Perlis has been weakened by the bickering between factions led by Menteri Besar Shahidan Kassim and by secretary-general Radzi Sheikh Ahmad respectively.

This could affect the six areas where Shahidan holds sway and four where Radzi is in control.

Seats at risk are: Simpang Empat (Umno), Guar Sanji (Umno), Pauh (Umno), Santan (Umno), Beseri (Umno), Titi Tinggi (Umno), Kuala Perlis (Umno), Kayang (Umno) and Bintong (Umno).

Other states

In MALACCA, two state seats promise fireworks. These are Kesidang, where DAP state chief Goh Leong San will be taking on MCA incumbent and state exco Koh Nai Kwong, and Bachang held by Gerakan. The opposition party is hoping to capture Bachang due to the internal problems in the state Gerakan. There are 28 state seats.

Observers expect the controversy surrounding pig farmers in the state to also have an impact on Chinese votes.

In NEGRI SEMBILAN, DAP won two state seats in 2004, but one of their candidates Lim Fui Ming (Bahau) has since crossed over to MCA. DAP is adamant to reclaim the seat from Lim who is representing MCA in this polls. Other seats targetted by DAP are Temiang, Bukit Kepayang and Mambau. It is expected to retain Lubok. There are 36 state seats.

In JOHOR, DAP is hopeful of taking the Bentayan and Skudai state seats controlled by MCA. This is the homestate of MCA president Ong Ka Ting and has always been a BN stronghold. There are 56 state seats.