

Can 'gentle' Tsen become giant killer in Batu Sapi battle?

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NEWS ANALYSIS SANDAKAN - Like everyone else, Linda Tsen Thau Lin has a 'wish list'. But on Nov 4, she wants her biggest wish to be granted

On that day, the 'gentle' Tsen wants to take on the mantle of battling two 'goliaths' of Sabah politics to enable her to continue the good work of her late husband.

Tsen, the Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate, wants to emerge victorious in the Batu Sapi parliamentary by-election.

Early this month, her husband, Edmund Chong, who was Batu Sapi member of parliament, was killed in an accident involving his motorcycle and a car.

His death has prompted the by-election. However, many political analysts think it would be an uphill task for Tsen as she faces two of Sabah's political heavyweights.

Tsen, of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), is up against Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) president Yong Teck Lee, who is also former Sabah chief minister, and Tuaran Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) chief and prominent lawyer Ansari Abdullah.

"If she makes it, she would be a 'giant killer', creating an upset in our political history where a woman candidate managed to beat the two political heavyweights in a by-election," said Dr Sivamurugan Pandian, a political analyst of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

He said this was the first time BN had fielded a woman candidate in any by-election after the March 2008 General Election, and the fact that women made up 46 per cent of the voters in the constituency, could not be ignored.

Batu Sapi has 25,582 voters, comprising 24,047 ordinary and 1,535 postal voters, of which 13,835 are male (54.08 per cent) and 11,747 female (45.92 per cent).

Dr Sivamurugan said Tsen could be a 'giant killer', depending on to what extent the BN component parties could unite by putting the party first, as well as "to clean up the machinery" to enable her to reach out to as many voters as she could.

"With the huge manpower as resources, you can do that," he said, adding that the biggest challenge for BN is the huge responsibility placed upon the state BN leadership as Prime Minister and BN chairman Najib Abdul Razak has said, 'BN must win'.

"It's a huge responsibility for the state BN under Musa Aman to bring back unity in the component and show that the March 2008 political tsunami ended only in Sarawak, and did not extend to Sabah."

In the last general election, BN won 24 out of 25 parliamentary seats in Sabah.

Dr Sivamurugan said, another aspect that would be put to the test for BN in the by-election was its new "political communication" tool, as the BN components had not been communicating well with one another in the past.

"Political communication is the new tool for the New Political Model in the changing landscape. How to communicate between leader-to-leader, leader-to-follower and follower-to-follower, that's what BN is lacking..."

"Therefore, in this by-election, it would be the first test to this new model for the BN components," he said.

The fact that it is a three-corner contest may work to BN's advantage as the opposition pact led by PKR has been trading swipes with the Sabah-based opposition party, SAPP, which may not augur well for the opposition to wrest this seat.

Even PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail described SAPP's decision to contest the seat as "spoiler" while PKR candidate for Batu Sapi Ansari Abdullah said SAPP was not an opposition party, but more an Independent party.

SAPP, in return, has hit back at the PKR leadership, saying it tangled with internal bickering which showed the party was crumbling and its popularity fading.

In his political gathering speech Tuesday night, Yong pointed out to the clash that erupted on Sunday at the Sandakan airport between Ansari's supporters and Sabah PKR chief Ahmad Thamrin Jaini.

"The supporters for the PKR candidate were fighting in the airport. They were quarrelling. From this, do you think that Anwar will respect the people's choice?"

"If the members of this family are always fighting, why should we join them? SAPP can be friends with PR but we do not want to marry them."

"It does not make sense that only after we are 'married', we can receive their help," he said. - Bernama

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