

Unease in Kelantan over Dr Mahathir alliance

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KOTA BARU: There is a sense of unease among Chinese voters here who have previously been comfortable with the PAS-led state government.

For decades, the community - which makes up a small 3.5% of the total population in Kelantan - has supported the Islamist party.

Despite coming from different religious and cultural backgrounds, the local Chinese have felt at home in Kelantan.

However, overtly racially insensitive statements made by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad have caused the community to question if PAS and the coalition it is part of, Perikatan Nasional, are still the smart choice for them.

Dr Mahathir recently buried the hatchet with Perikatan leaders, even appearing on stage with them and giving speeches while exhorting voters to choose PAS and Perikatan.

Met at a kopitiam with his friends here, a man who wanted to be known only as Uncle Lee



said support for Perikatan from his fellow Chinese will be markedly reduced.

“Mark my words, most will vote for Anwar this time around,” said Uncle Lee as he sipped his cuppa, referring to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, whose coalition Pakatan Harapan, together with Barisan Nasional, is facing a challenge from Perikatan.

“I voted for PAS in the last three general elections because I was happy with the party, but now, it wants to align itself with Dr Mahathir. What is this?” he said.

His friend, Uncle Ng, looked annoyed as soon as the former prime minister’s name was mentioned.

Of late, Dr Mahathir has been issuing a series of statements claiming that “Malaysia belongs to the Malays” and it would be “unconstitutional” to promote the country as a multiracial nation.

“Dr Mahathir keeps implying that we Chinese are all pendatang (outsiders). What about him? When did his family come to (the then) Malaya?”

“My family has been here for many generations. This is the land where I have built my family, formed many friendships and do my small business. How am I a pendatang?” Ng added.

Asked if they would vote for Perikatan should its parties distance themselves from Dr Mahathir, Lee said that might be possible.

He said his love for Tan Sri Nik Aziz Nik Mat is still “as good as new” and he finds it difficult to forget “all the nasty things” that Dr Mahathir had uttered in the past decades about the late Kelantan menteri besar - fondly

known as Tok Guru.

“I am also upset with all these stories about how some PAS leaders are trying to erase Tok Guru’s legacy in the party. Look at what happened to his son Nik Abduh. He is such a gentleman. Even after being sidelined, he still calls on the people to support PAS,” Lee added.

Nik Abduh, a previous PAS MP for Pasir Mas and Bachok, has not been selected to stand in the Aug 12 state election, despite earlier speculation that he would be a candidate.

Political analyst Prof Dr Awang Azman Awang Pawi concurred that Chinese votes for Perikatan would likely be affected this time around due to its alliance with Dr Mahathir.

However, he said this may only show in urban areas such as the Kota Lama state seat.

“The Chinese sentiment this time is that they like Anwar but they don’t like Dr Mahathir, and this is a normal sentiment for urban Chinese.

“But for the ones in rural areas, that may be difficult to read,” added Awang Azman.

Kelantan MCA chairman Chua Hock Kuan believes there will be a shift in Chinese votes in the east coast state, especially since the community’s favourite assemblyman, Datuk Anuar Tan Abdullah of PAS, is not contesting in the upcoming polls. Anuar had held the Kota Lama state seat for five terms since 1999.

“With Anuar Tan not contesting, I believe the Pakatan candidate for Kota Lama (Dr Hafidzah Mustakim of Amanah) has a good chance of winning.

“I believe Pakatan-Barisan will gain an advantage in the Kelantan state election because we all know that Pakatan is still the main choice for the Chinese,” he said.

The Kota Lama seat is seeing a four-cornered fight that also includes Datuk Zamri Ismail (PAS), Tan Boon Kian (Parti Rakyat Malaysia) and Izat Bukhary Ismail Bukhary (Independent).

PAS’ Pengkalan Pasir candidate Muhammad Nasrif Daud - who is the Pasir Mas division treasurer - said he agreed that the urban Chinese may vote for Pakatan, but it could be a different story in the semi-rural and rural areas.