

**Selangor, Toughest Battlefield In Next Election?**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 16 (Bernama) -- Selangor, said to be the richest state in the country, is set to be a much sought after icing on the cake for both the opposition and Barisan Nasional (BN) in the coming general election.

Yet, winning the state will be a tough battle, either for BN or for the PAS-PKR-DAP pact.

Amid talks that the general election is looming, analysts train their eyes on Selangor and predict the likelihood of the opposition finding it difficult to retain the state, and BN having a tough time winning it back.

Political analyst at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said it was an open secret that BN is focusing a lot of efforts to recapture the state.

"The dynamic political landscape in Selangor, now with more urbanised and young people becoming electors, will certainly make it harder for any side to win votes. I believe the upcoming Selangor BN convention on Sept 17 will shed some light on how Umno is going to face the challenge.

"Although there are many issues involving the current state government, the question is, has Umno managed to minimise its own issues at the state level? Has the party identified the general to lead and unite the team?" he said.

The "general" can either be Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar or Selangor opposition leader Datuk Mohamad Satim Diman, the two leaders seen as capable of leading the state Umno.

But then again, said Dr Sivamurugan, Umno could also look outside its present circle for someone "who can pacify all groups."

The upcoming convention, he added, should focus on the need to unite to win back the state.

"As for now, if you ask me to rate the situation, I would say it's still 50-50. It's going to be a tough fight till the end. There are so many mixed constituencies."

Dr Sivamurugan said while Selangor BN machinery seems to be working okay, the fact remains that the fight is going to be tough because it has to deal with the "populist approach" adopted by the state government.

The state PKR government also has in their disposal all the machinery, something they had no access to in the 2008 general election, he added.

"This is the strongest and most challenging point that the BN has to face," he said.

Tony Pua, the DAP publicity chief and Selangor DAP deputy chairman, said at the moment the odd is at 53-47 in favour of Pakatan.

He was concerned however about the Indian and Malay voters, saying these groups play a crucial role in semi-urban constituencies.

"It's not going to be easy. We are comfortable in urban but not in semi-urban areas, for example in places like Hulu Selangor and Kapar (where) 10 per cent (of the support) can swing either way," he said.

Citing Ijok as an example, Pua said 29 per cent of the voters are from the Indian community, and without compelling issues such as those raised by Hindraf, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim's position could be in danger.

It will be very challenging for Pakatan in Selangor because the BN has been putting all the firepower to win back the state, he pointed out.

"That is why marginal seats will play a very important role. In Ijok, we won with less than 2,000 votes, Sekinchan with less than 200 votes, Teluk Datuk with less 700 votes. The seats we won with less than 2,000 votes are considered marginal and 'risky' seats. Its will be a mother of all battles, no doubt about it," he said.

"In 2008, five to 10 seats we lost with less than 2,000 votes. There are about 10 to 12 seats which we viewed as crucial at present," he added.

Another analyst Ong Kian Ming sees the scenario of both sides playing hardball strategies, with the possibility of Pakatan refusing to dissolve the state assembly if the 13th general election is called before 2013.

In Penang and Kedah, he said, the federal government was somewhat more accommodative. For instance the water deal and acquisition of water assets in Penang were seen as favourable to the state. "But, for Selangor, it's different," he noted.

The state is also facing many political undercurrents including the scenario of Abdul Khalid being pressured to make way for PKR deputy president Azmin Ali.

However, the BN is not without a problem of its own, one of which is finding the replacement for Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo, the former Selangor Umno chief.

"No candidate is acceptable to all," said Ong.

Political analyst Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria meanwhile said the major problem for BN in recapturing Selangor was how it could come up with an alternative to Pakatan, including an alternative leader to Abdul Khalid.

"What is the alternative framework? Where is the BN of Selangor? You can't see them. Khir is out.

"Who is (to be the BN's) Selangor MB? They have no rising star. In Kedah, they have Datuk Muhkriz (Tun Mahathir) and several others," he said, adding that the BN should unveil its potential leader to face Abdul Khalid.

Analyst Norizan Sharif predicted it would be a close fight in Selangor with no party capable of winning a two-third majority.

"Both sides can win around 16 seats each. This basically means 32 out of the total 56 state

seats. The battle will be on the remaining 24," he said, adding that if BN could increase its popular support by five per cent, it has a brighter chance of winning Selangor back.

Norizan said he believed that governance and credibility of leaders will go a long way in winning the votes.

"What is worrying is that if people are fed-up with politics, they may not take part in the next general election. If this happens, it would be an uphill battle for our democracy."

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