

In Johor, Malays express support for Pakatan's non-Malay candidates
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KULAI, April 14 — The predominantly Malay voters in Umno's birthplace of Johor have expressed support for Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) non-Malay candidates in the May 5 general election, reflecting the close battle for the state and Putrajaya in Election 2013.

Several Malay voters, drawn by the presence of PAS spiritual adviser Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat in a PR ceramah here last night, told The Malaysian Insider that they would go beyond race in picking the right person to represent them.

"There's no problem in choosing non-Malay candidates, the important thing is that the people's representative is good...there's no use choosing (candidate from) the same race but in the end they betray their own race," 64-year-old Nordin Borhan from Pekan Nenas told The Malaysian Insider.

Mohd Noor Omar, who has resided in Johor for 12 years, pointed to the ceramah's scene where a mixed crowd was seen together as proof that PR succeeded in bringing together those from different races.

"The acceptance by various races of the PR leadership shows there's no gap with everyone," said the businessman.

"I have no problem... if the candidate is good, we set aside the party symbols," said 48-year-old Sadiyah Tengah from Senai, when met at the ceramah featuring several prominent PR leaders here.

Their views will come as a surprise in Johor, where the original Umno was formed in 1946 and remains a staunchly Alliance and Barisan Nasional (BN) state since Merdeka in 1957.

Ex-prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who founded Umno Baru to replace Umno that was declared illegal 1988, told Johoreans two weeks ago to bury the political careers of DAP's Lim Kit Siang contesting the Gelang Patah seat. Several other non-Malay candidates are also running in Johor.

Despite optimism and support from the Malay voters, some Chinese supporters expressed their doubts of a win for the opposition pact, saying the Malay vote could possibly be more in favour of BN.

"It doesn't matter who wins, most important is take care of people's interest," a retiree who only wanted to be known as Tay said, finally saying that it would be a "50-50" fight between both sides.

When asked about PR's chances in Kulai, 60-year-old workshop owner Wong said that "Malaysia has many Malays", adding the word "Umno" by way of explanation in suggesting that some from the community would vote for BN.

He pointed to speculation that the votes in the Chinese new villages in Election 2008 were enough to ensure a win for PR in Kulai, but said there were claims that Malay votes had in the end cut off the possible victory.

In 2008, MCA's former president Tan Sri Ong Ka Ting won the Kulai federal seat against DAP's Ng Pak Siong with a 11,744 majority. MCA had also won by over 18,000 votes in 2004.

Kulai is a predominantly Chinese seat, with the community making up 56 per cent and the Malay voters amounting to 32 per cent of the population there.

Kulai DAP media coordinator Wong Shu Qi said that Chinese voters previously had a negative impression of PAS and Nik Aziz, citing the media's portrayal of the Islamist party.

"But I think tonight, after seeing him personally with their own eyes, at least the negative perception has been thrown away," she said yesterday in acknowledging that the Chinese supporters in the crowd had also warmly welcomed him.

According to Wong, more than RM20,000 was raised during the ceramah where another crowd-puller, DAP veteran leader Lim Kit Siang was present.

Critics of the PR pact that was formed in 2008 claim that its three parties -PKR, DAP, PAS - has vastly different ideologies and its alleged inability to represent the different races in the country.

The DAP, which says it has a multiracial leadership, has been trying to shake off its image as a Chinese-based party, while its ally PAS had yesterday confirmed that it will be fielding two non-Muslims from its PAS Supporters Congress in Johor.

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