

**BN sees gain from PAS, PKR's Sungai Aceh fiasco**  
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**By Opalyn Mok**

NIBONG TEBAL, April 22 — The just-resolved tussle for the rural Sungai Aceh state seat between Pakatan Rakyat (PR) allies PAS and PKR is still set to benefit Barisan Nasional (BN) there, coalition candidate Datuk Mahmud Zakaria has said.

Both PKR and PAS had submitted nomination forms for their respective candidates on Saturday to contest for the seat against incumbent Mahmud.

PKR fielded blogger Badrul Hisham Shaharin, popularly known as Chegubard, while PAS sent in state Youth chief Yusni Mat Piah.

Earlier today, PAS party president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang reportedly said that the party will support PKR candidates contesting in the Labuan federal seat as well as the Sungai Aceh and Panti state seats in return for PKR supporting PAS candidates for the three Terengganu seats.

But come polling day on May 5, the ballot papers will still bear both PKR and PAS logons on them, as the nominations were already accepted by the elections returning officer.

"I hope this earlier division will result in a win not only for Sungai Aceh but also for Nibong Tebal parliamentary and the nearby Sungai Bakap state seat," Mahmud said in a press conference after a BN election machinery briefing at Kampung Batas Pinang recently.

He said the earlier tussle for the seat has already created the impression that PR was divided, and not as cohesive as it tries to present itself to the voters.

"Even though it is now a straight fight, BN still has strong support because we managed to retain this seat even though PR won all the other seats under the Nibong Tebal constituency in Election 2008," said Mahmud.

In 2008, Mahmud won with a 250-vote majority, down from the 3,193-margin BN's Mohd Foad Mat Isa had managed in 2004.

"The majority was reduced in 2008 because of the political tsunami but I believe that despite me being the opposition in Penang, I managed to provide good service to my constituents in the past five years so they will support me again," he said.

Mahmud admitted that if he were contesting against a PAS candidate, the party already has a strong 2,500 support base to work from.

"It would give them a strong base but now that it's a PKR candidate who is also an outsider, it will be difficult for them to win support of locals," he said.

In the rural constituency where agriculture and aquaculture are the main industries and where villages are spread out along narrow roads amidst paddy fields and palm oil estates, the villagers still have a preference for someone who's local.

"This is because they want someone who's here all the time so that he could immediately look into their problems and help them solve any issues," Mahmud said.

His opponent, Badrul Hisham, went a step further to introduce a 10-point manifesto for Sungai Acheh.

Born in Negeri Sembilan and contesting for the first time in Penang, Badrul promised in his manifesto to turn the constituency into an agriculture hub for Penang.

He also pledged to build a bridge across Sungai Krian to link Kampung Tanjung Berembang to the Nibong Tebal township.

This is the same pledge that Mahmud made to his constituents. Currently, there is only a narrow pedestrian bridge for motorcycles, cyclists and pedestrians to cross between the village and the town.

Badrul told a press conference today that he planned to set up a free vocational training centre and also to organise an annual job fair to give the locals more employment opportunities.

He also wanted to build an activity centre for youth development programmes.

"I want to bring development here and ensure it is on par with the development of the state to increase the standard of living for the people," he said.

Mahmud, in turn, planned to build another school and a sports complex at the constituency.

"The land, both federal land, have already being identified to build the buildings," he said.

Knowing that the villagers prefer the "personal" touch, Badrul Hisham promised to set up a moving operations centre to go to the people to help them instead of waiting for them to go to the PKR service centre.

"Within a week of winning this seat, I will set this up to offer help wherever needed," he said.

He had also challenged Mahmud to an open debate on policies and plans for the constituency this April 27; Mahmud said he was not interested.

"Why public debate? I say let the people decide based on my service and if I want to debate, I will do it at the state assembly," he said.

There are 15,592 voters in Sungai Acheh, of which 66 per cent are Malay, 26 per cent Chinese and six per cent Indian.

This May 5, 13.3 million voters will be casting their votes for 222 parliamentary and 505 state seats.

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