

Anwar and Guan Eng appeal to voters in shaky PKR seats
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GEORGE TOWN, April 30 — Support for Pakatan Rakyat (PR) may be strong in Penang but the coalition could lose two of its parliamentary seats, Nibong Tebal and Balik Pulau, where its de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been roped in to rouse up support.

In his one-day trip to Penang yesterday, Anwar made Teluk Bahang his first stop where he spoke to a small group of about 300 locals and urged them to support the PKR Balik Pulau parliamentary candidate Mohd Bakhtiar Wan Chik.

PKR had dropped Balik Pulau MP Yusmadi Yusoff from defending the seat and introduced Mohd Bakhtiar, who is not only new but considered an “outsider” and not well-received by villagers.

“There is a time and place for everything so when we picked Yusmadi in 2008, it was the right time and place to put him here in Balik Pulau but this time, we believe that it is more appropriate to place him in PKR headquarters and put Mohd Bakhtiar here in his place,” Anwar told the crowd.

He acknowledged that many strong Yusmadi supporters are angered by the party leadership’s decision to drop the young lawyer from contesting this time around and tried to pacify them.

“We must look at the bigger picture and not be carried away by anger. Mohd Bakhtiar is a capable candidate and he has ample experience,” he said.

He said what was important now was for PKR to retain the seat and not let Barisan Nasional wrest it back.

Yusmadi had won the seat in Election 2008 with a 708-vote majority and this time around, BN showed it was serious in winning it back by placing well-liked local Umno leader Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya.

Hilmi, who had previously won the Teluk Bahang state seat under this parliamentary constituency, is confident that he can wrest the seat from PKR’s grasp.

“We have gained back a lot of support from voters here so we’re confident of not only winning the parliamentary seat but also all three state seats here,” he said.

The three state seats under Balik Pulau are Bayan Lepas, Pulau Betong and Teluk Bahang, all won by BN but with very slim majorities of fewer than 500 votes.

Today, caretaker Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng also visited the Balik Pulau market and town, possibly to try to garner support from voters there for PR.

Well-known and well-liked by many Penang folk, Lim’s presence in this sleepy town is expected to bring back the confidence of the people for PR.

Two days earlier, Lim had also visited Nibong Tebal, another shaky parliamentary seat that

Anwar mentioned.

Anwar had said this seat was shaky due to the earlier tussle for the Sungai Aceh state seat between PKR and PAS.

"Datuk Mansor Othman's campaign is shaky there so I will need to go over there to explain and resolve the issue there," he said.

Mansor, who is the caretaker deputy chief minister I, was placed there to garner stronger support after the former PKR Nibong Tebal MP Tan Tee Beng defected and left the party just a year after winning the seat in Election 2008.

However, due to a tussle for the Sungai Aceh state seat between PKR and PAS, which PAS finally relented to let PKR contest, the seat was deemed to be shaky and could easily fall back to BN.

Mansor is defending the seat against BN's Datuk Zainal Abidin Osman, who is a local unlike Mansor and also more well-known among local voters, and an independent Teng Kok Pheng.

Zainal Abidin was also the previous Nibong Tebal MP before losing the seat to Tan in 2008.

"PAS president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang had tried to calm the situation on Monday when he dropped by at Kubang Semang so now I'm going there to also resolve any issues there," Anwar said.

It will prove to be a close fight between PKR and BN in both the Balik Pulau and Nibong Tebal constituencies but there are a few more days of campaigning yet so voters may swing either way depending on the issues both sides play up for leverage.

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