

In Kedah, MB's missteps could hurt PAS's chances
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ALOR STAR, April 30 — Kedah seems vulnerable and may fall to Barisan Nasional (BN) given the low-key campaigning by Pakatan Rakyat (PR) led by ailing PAS Menteri Besar Datuk Azizan Bakar.

The sickly 68-year-old, who had a heart attack two years ago, prefers to campaign mostly from home, according to aides, reported the Singapore Straits Times today.

Local leaders say it is all in keeping with Kedah's low-key style of electioneering, it reported.

"The campaigning here is unlike the hoo-ha of Selangor. We campaign to small groups and go house to house," the paper quoted Ahmad Ikmal Ismail, deputy chief of a Kedah Umno division, as saying.

The paper said while campaigning in Kedah may be subdued, it does not mean it is not capable of springing a political surprise.

In 2008, nearly two-thirds of the 36 seats in the Kedah state legislature were won by the opposition PR with razor-thin margins. Since then, Azizan has alienated some by imposing Islamic and pro-Malay rules, all the while refusing to step down despite his poor health.

The Straits Times said all this is giving BN hope it can take back the state, especially with a son of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad leading the charge.

The last time around, Kedah shocked everyone by slipping from BN hands. Almost a third of the seats were lost by fewer than 1,000 votes, with one seat won by PAS by just 79 votes.

This time around, BN is rolling out a promise — that Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, son of Dr Mahathir, will be made menteri besar if Kedah returns to the fold. What could spoil his chances are murmurs of discontent from within Umno as other leaders were moved aside to accommodate Mukhriz.

"Having Mukhriz here will boost our chances. But we are focusing on winning first rather than who will be Menteri Besar," The Straits Times quoted Tan Keng Liang, Youth chief of Kedah Gerakan, part of the BN coalition.

The Singapore daily said the one term of opposition PR rule has not been particularly inspiring. MB Azizan has made several missteps that have irked the Chinese community, it reported.

Azizan enraged Chinese businessmen by requiring that 50 per cent of commercial property sales must be to Malays, up from 30 per cent previously. This has slowed business deals and projects in the state, critics told the daily.

Azizan also imposed a dress code for women singers to cover up at this year's Chinese New Year festivities. And he has yet to rebuild a pig abattoir that was torn down in 2009 following complaints from Malay villagers.

The paper said while PAS acknowledges the missteps, it sees Chinese voters remaining loyal to the PR alliance. Chinese form 15 per cent of the 1.9 million population in Kedah.

"We can win Kedah again but we have to work hard. If the Chinese voters stay with us, we will win," The Straits Times quoted PAS deputy president Muhammad Sabu, who is contesting a parliamentary seat in Kedah, as saying.

It reported pundits as saying that it may turn out that the minority Chinese and Indians will vote BN for the state assembly, but choose PR for the federal seats.

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