

The Kuala Besut by-election, creating history or stability?
Malaysian Insider
July 13 , 2013

NEWS ANALYSIS - PAS is scrambling to produce a hung state assembly – it happens if it wins the Kuala Besut by-election in Terengganu on July 24 to draw level at 16 seats with Barisan Nasional. At the other end, Umno is pulling out all the stops to ensure the east coast state remains in BN hands.

PAS wants to create this bit of history in Terengganu because it is confident the Terengganu people will benefit from a hung state assembly.

“Remember when Terengganu was ruled by PAS from 1999 to 2004? Who benefitted? The people of Terengganu benefitted the most,” a Terengganu political observer told The Malaysian Insider after nomination day yesterday.

After the 1999 elections, BN ruled the federal government but PAS controlled Terengganu. The result saw almost everyone in Terengganu getting the attention of both governments.

Using Islamic tithes or zakat, the PAS government gave aid to the people while BN introduced Wang Ehsan or cash payments at that time, using revenue from oil extracted from the state's waters. Everyone who had a problem was given help by both parties. In other words, what they wanted, they got.

The entire situation became a famous joke in Terengganu then. When politicians visited, they would ask ‘what does the rakyat want?’ The rakyat would say: “Our village is always flooded.”

The politicians would then say: “We will build a bridge.” But the rakyat would say: “But our village does not have a river.” Then the politicians replied: “We will build a river.”

However, after PAS lost in 2004, all that changed.

Those who received federal government assistance no longer got assistance from the state government. This was because the party handling the aid was from one party, BN. More aid would only be available when elections come again, observers said then.

The observers said PAS wants to bring that back. But this can only be achieved if PAS wins the by-election and get to run Terengganu again. If that happens, the rakyat would once again reap from the benefits, they said.

To make that happen, party insiders said PAS candidate Azlan Yusof will focus on three things in this by-election.

The businessman, popularly known as Che Long, is expected to emphasise poverty issues, the unemployment rate and social problems which plague the locals.

“I am ready and my strategy is simple. I will go to the ground with the locals during ceramah and religious activities,” he told a press conference at the PAS headquarters in Kampung Baru, Kuala Besut.

Though PAS is facing a tough fight, Terengganu PAS commissioner Mohamad Abdul Wahid Endut believes the state can fall into its hands again in the same way as when he won the Kuala Terengganu parliamentary by-election in 2009.

The Kuala Terengganu parliamentary by-election was held not long after the 2008 general election following the death of its MP Datuk Razali Ismail, who was then the Deputy Education Minister. During the general election, Razali won by beating PAS candidate Haji Mohamad Sabu and an independent candidate.

In the by-election, Wahid defeated Datuk Wan Mohd Farid, the Kuala Terengganu Umno chief. He was then also the Wakaf Mempelam assemblyman.

STABILITY

But BN thinks Kuala Besut voters need to support it in the July 24 by-election to ensure the state government is stable.

Only a stable government can give attention to the people, said BN campaign director Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. On the need to ensure stability alone, he said, Tengku Zaihan Che Ku Abd Rahmad was named to contest in this by-election.

"The candidate's role is important because Terengganu DUN now is unsure, but I hope after July 24, the country's politics will return to stable under BN," said Muhyiddin, who is also the deputy prime minister, at a press conference after the candidate was revealed at the Kompleks Rakan Muda Kuala Besut.

If BN's Tengku Zaihan wins, the coalition will have 17 state seats again. However, if PAS's Che Long wins, BN will have the same number of seats as the Pakatan Rakyat (PR). At the moment, PAS has 14 while PKR has one under the Pakatan umbrella.

And if it goes to PAS, history will be created and surprises can be expected in the politics and governance of Terengganu. - July 13, 2013.

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