

More Party Members Arrive As Campaign Enters Final Lap
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KUALA BESUT, July 22 (Bernama) - More members of Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties and PAS are converging on this fishing town as campaign for the Kuala Besut by-election enters the final lap.

The state by-election has caught the public attention as the outcome will determine whether the BN will remain with 17 seats in the Terengganu State Assembly or end up with equal number of seats with the opposition with 16 each.

The election campaign of both parties intensified since Friday as more party leaders arrived here after the parliament session ended on Thursday.

The fact that the by-election falls within Ramadan has managed to keep the situation calm despite all the political rhetoric during campaigning.

Political analyst Che Hamdan Che Mohd Razali said the BN election machinery is more organised with small groups engaged in door-to-door visits, religious classes and talks at mosques and surau.

He observed that BN candidate Tengku Zaihan Che Ku Abdul Rahman, 37, is utilising his personal touch by trying to meet as many voters as possible.

The BN election machinery is solid as Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin leads the way backed by Besut Member of Parliament Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, Umno Supreme Council members and Umno wing leaders.

"Without national issues such as human rights and corruption, the BN or to be specific the Umno and PAS clash is more focused on local issues such as development and the local community," Che Hamdan told Bernama.

The pairing of former menteri besar Idris and Tengku Zaihan, a civil engineer with the Irrigation and Drainage Department has instilled confidence among the Kuala Besut public.

"Idris has done a lot for Terengganu. The rapid development was triggered by Idris and I can see that his influence is still strong in Besut," said the senior lecturer of Political Science at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Dungun.

On paper, the Idris aura and the position of Kuala Besut known as the BN stronghold gives BN the advantage to retain the state seat.

"The election machinery is well organised and the candidate (Tengku Zaihan) has visited all the voting areas. The voters response has been encouraging," said Idris, who is also the Second Education Minister.

This important by-election sees the BN campaigning on the theme 'Kuala Besut Bertambah Biru' (Kuala Besut Turning Bluer) to maintain the status quo.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Said has been working hard in Kuala Besut together with

other elected representatives to ensure victory for BN.

MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai and vice-president Gan Ping Sieu were present to gain the support of 125 Chinese voters while MIC deputy president Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam came to get the Indian votes.

Malaysian Ulama Muda Secretariat chairman Fathul Bari Mat Jahaya said BN campaign approach of meeting voters in small groups has proven effective.

"The country's political landscape has changed, personal touch and engagement with the people bring greater impact," he added.

PAS which is campaigning on the '16-16'slogan is keeping to its public rally strategy by banking on party big guns to draw a big crowd.

Spiritual leader Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat, president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, PKR adviser Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and strategy director Rafizi Ramli are all here.

However, attendance of Kuala Besut voters at the rallies can be disputed as many are believed to be from outside Terengganu as seen by the many outstation registered vehicles parked along the roads.

The BN candidate Tengku Zaihan is involved in a straight fight with PAS candidate Endot @ Azlan Yusof, 48, a contractor.

Kuala Besut voters go to the polls on Wednesday. It has 17,683 voters of whom 17,463 voters are Malays, 125 Chinese and the remaining from other races.

Some 79.36 percent or 911 of 1,148 military, police personnel and their spouses voted in advance at the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) Base in Gong Kedak on Saturday.

The Kuala Besut state by-election is held following the death of incumbent Dr A. Rahman Mokhtar of Barisan Nasional (BN), due to lung cancer on June 26.

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