

**Kuala Besut defeat an opportunity for PAS to take stock**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**July 24 , 2013**  
**NEWS ANALYSIS BY THE MALAYSIAN INSIDER**

It was always an uphill battle for PAS to take Kuala Besut, the Barisan Nasional (BN) stronghold bordering the Islamist party-controlled Kelantan in Malaysia's east coast.

Despite PAS switching its strategy by replacing a cleric with businessman Endut @ Azlan Yusof as its candidate, BN won the July 24 by-election with a bigger 2,592 majority to the 2,434 gained in the May 5 general elections.

The defeat, however, could be a blessing for the party and a chance to take stock of its future strategies after winning slightly fewer seats in Election 2013, getting only 21 federal seats to the 23 won in the 2008 general elections.

The Islamist party within the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) pact had been drifting quietly since GE13, where hardliners won in the country's conservative belt but the party's moderates lost in the more progressive west coast.

Those aligned to party president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang believed the party did well in the general elections but others thoughts that PAS did not deliver the rural Malay vote, or even the Felda vote across 54 federal seats.

The Kuala Besut by-election in Terengganu, which it ruled again for one term from 1999 to 2004, was the party's chance to knock out BN and realise its aim of forcing a hung state assembly.

But BN candidate Tengku Zaihan Che Ku Abdul Rahman's win last night meant the ruling coalition keeps 17 seats in the 32-seat state legislature against PAS's 14 seats and PKR's sole seat.

PAS had been hopeful as an Ilham Centre survey showed that Endut or Che Long as he is widely known, had a popularity rating of 71.6% to 14.2% for the BN candidate. PAS candidate Azlan Yusof (left) was found to be popular with the voters but it did not translate to votes for his party. The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, July 24, 2013. PAS candidate Azlan Yusof (left) was found to be popular with the voters but it did not translate to votes for his party. The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, July 24, 2013.

However, the same survey showed that 77.2% of voters would choose party over candidate while 12.8% opted for the candidate's personal profile first.

And finally, 82.7% of the voters believed more in BN due to its financial muscle and development promises that totalled nearly half a billion ringgit or RM19,000 a voter.

Analysts said the survey showed BN's continued appeal in rural areas such as Kuala Besut, where villagers are content with largesse dished out by the ruling coalition over promises made by the opposition.

But PAS's Abdul Hadi believed that the constituency's remoteness had led to a lack of access to the Internet, which he told voters would help them make an informed decision to support the Islamist party over BN.

After all, all main towns in Malaysia except Kangar were won by PR either through PAS, PKR or DAP.

But in remote areas, getting on the ground to meet people, shake hands and discuss politics or fulfill promises had been the way to win votes but PAS eschewed that for social media which worked better in urban areas.

It is understood that PAS also suffered as old timers in the area remembered the antagonistic issues that separated the Islamist party from Umno, such as calling each other infidels, separate prayer leaders that made it look more conservative than it is these days.

PAS insiders said the party had tried to re-image itself by putting a businessman to talk about the economy. But that did not work for a population that remembered a very conservative and puritanical Islamist party under a younger Abdul Hadi, especially during his rule as *mentri besar* between 1999 and 2004.

Issues played up by PAS to attack Umno were also deflected as BN used its promise of development and aid to solve neglected problems such as a faulty dam and siltation in the area's river mouth. BN candidate Tengku Zaihan (left) waves to his supporters, acknowledging their cheers as the results of the Kuala Besut by-election are announced. The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, July 25, 2013. BN candidate Tengku Zaihan (left) waves to his supporters, acknowledging their cheers as the results of the Kuala Besut by-election are announced. The Malaysian Insider pic by Afif Abd Halim, July 25, 2013.

The biggest mistake PAS made was that it wanted a hung state assembly but did not want the *mentri besar*'s job, saying BN's Datuk Ahmad Said would continue to hold that post, said party officials.

"It sent a wrong message to the voters, that even if PAS won, the party won't be able to solve their poverty. Only BN can do that through Ahmad in Terengganu and BN in Putrajaya.

"So why vote for PAS then. Stay with BN and get money, solutions to problems and a better future," an official told The Malaysian Insider.

Political analysts said it reflected the lack of critical thinking and better strategies to win over the rural vote.

"Keeping a hardline outlook won't feed the people, some PAS leaders need to know that," one said.

Another analyst said the party must review its strategies for future elections and not send mixed signals.

"The bigger defeat in Kuala Besut could help PAS if everyone wakes up to see how their strategies failed this time," he added.- July 25, 2013.

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