

PAS pushed for the Felda vote, but didn't get past the kitchen
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In 2011, Mazlan Aliman (pic) received the most votes to be a PAS central committee member because the Islamist party believed his strategy to get Felda votes would win Putrajaya for Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The boy who started out as a PAS party worker in 1985 putting up posters was now the president of Persatuan Anak-Anak Peneroka Felda Kebangsaan (Anak) - children of settlers who were the backbone of rural support for Umno.

Over the years, Mazlan and his friends had raised various issues about life in the Federal Land Development (Felda) settlements since Anak was formed in 2007. And they protested the public listing of a Felda unit as that would dilute the settlers' ownership of the settlements.

PAS believed these issues would help them unseat Umno and Barisan Nasional (BN) in 54 federal and 94 state seats where Felda settlements could be found. After all, the Islamist party had branches in 75 percent of the Felda settlements.

But PAS failed, losing in almost all the seats where Felda settlers formed a majority of voters in Election 2013.

What went wrong?

Now almost 100 days after the May 5 polls, Mazlan and a few PAS members in the Felda settlements blamed their failure on BN's racial and financial campaign that cost them the key women's vote.

"The general election was important in penetrating Felda areas because BN used an all-out racial and financial benefits campaign to maintain their fixed deposit," Mazlan told The Malaysian Insider.

He said PAS party workers campaigned hard for the party candidates but could not get past the kitchen door.

The Felda womenfolk, he said, stayed at home and were not exposed to PAS political programmes but instead, were influenced by the BN-controlled media and Felda-sponsored events.

"In Felda, everything is under control. Every area has a village head. Every 20 houses has a chief, assistant chief and committee members.

"At the higher levels, there is a Felda manager, assistant and officers who control every settlers and their families' movement.

"It is different from traditional villages, what more the town areas," Mazlan said, offering a slice of life in the settlements and the difficulties involved in meeting and influencing the settlers.

The stakes were also higher in the last election, he said, adding BN used racial issues and money to good effect to counter the PAS strategy of raising issues about the settlements.

"Imagine Puteri Umno and women's wing went to the settlers' homes to give out rice with a special message... this is rice, keep the rice properly, when the Chinese rules Malaysia, we would have rice shortage," Mazlan related what an Anak committee member had told him.

He said BN had reinforced that campaign strategy with pamphlets, CDs, briefings and money, adding it was made easier by the ruling government's links within Felda.

He said the settlers believed that the DAP would be the party governing Malaysia if PR won the elections because they were not aware that it only contested in 45 out of the 222 parliamentary seats.

Although PAS tried to counter the Umno campaign, party critics said it appeared that the Islamist party did not push enough to explain PR's alliance and DAP's tiny fraction of the seat distribution.

But the PAS explanation worked in Temerloh, said lawyer and local son Abdullah Karim.

"I returned to Temerloh four days before the elections. When I was giving ceramahs, I would explain that the BN campaign was a lie and asked how were the Chinese going to rule Malaysia if they are only 35 percent and DAP only contested 45 out of the 222 parliamentary seats," he told The Malaysian Insider.

As a result, PAS won Temerloh although there were several Felda areas there.

Mazlan said the Election 2013 campaign revealed that when issues were not explained properly in Felda areas, the settlers would not give PAS their votes because they feared the Chinese would rule Malaysia.

"Felda settlers are not so educated and so they are easily influenced by such campaign. What more, with the money paid to Felda of about RM15,000 each family," he added.

He also pointed out that BN had influenced the second-generation settlers by using Anak's approach of asking for a house within the settlements.

"BN came and made show houses for the second generation settlers. If they wanted the house, they must ensure BN wins.

"This was a very effective campaign," said Mazlan, adding it worked for the newly-weds and those between the ages of 30 to 50.

Planning

After a post-election analysis, Mazlan and his friends have now finalised some plans for the next five years before the next general election.

"We will first register Anak as a company, so that Anak would not be accused again of being an illegal association," he said, referring to the Umno campaign during Election 2013.

And PAS would have to set up more branches in Felda plantations to get better results, he added.

"The Felda areas with branches and substantial number of members made good achievements during the last election.

"For example, Felda Lurah Bilut had 41 percent voters supporting us even though it had a DAP candidate because we had a branch and many PAS members. It was also similar in Kerteh, Terengganu," said Mazlan.

He said this meant PAS members would have to work harder to garner more support for PR in Felda areas and to strengthen PAS's position.

"PAS will be stronger if more branches are opened, more members are recruited and more programmes held in stages.

"For example, we need to have kindergartens such as Pasti (Pusat Asuhan Tunas Islam), religious classes and youth programmes," Mazlan said.

He was confident that support for PAS in Felda settlement would be stronger in the next general election if the party executed its plans well to expand and explain PR policies. - August 12, 2013.

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