

Teluk Intan: Opportunity for BN To Redeem Its Pride?

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KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- Can the Teluk Intan parliamentary seat by-election be the avenue for Barisan Nasional (BN) to redeem its pride after being defeated at the constituency for the last two general elections?

Though the 7,313 majority garnered by DAP in the 13th General Election (GE13) poses a formidable challenge for BN, it does not mean there is no chance for BN at least on paper.

This is a far different scenario when compared with the Bukit Gelugor by election in Penang on May 25 where BN, if contesting, is seriously the underdog as the late Karpal Singh, who was also former DAP Chairman recorded a whopping 42,706 majority in GE13.

In GE13, Gerakan President Datuk Mah Siew Keong lost the challenge to DAP's Seah Leong Peng in Teluk Intan. However, Seah passed away of bladder cancer on May 1 and the Election Commission had set May 19 as the nomination date and May 31 as the polling date.

MIXED FORTUNES FOR BN AND DAP

Party strategist pointed out since 1995, the constituency has seen five general election and one by-election with both DAP and Gerakan-BN winning three times. In other words, they believe BN still has a fair chance.

"In 2013 general election, Mah received 74 percent of the Malay votes, 15 percent of the Chinese votes and 50 percent of the Indian votes although BN lost by 7,313 votes.

Bulk of DAP's vote came from the Pasir Bedamar state constituency area while Changkat Jong seemed to be BN's forte," said Gerakan linked think tank Socio-Economic Development and Research Institute's (SEDAR) executive Director Ivanpal S. Grewal.

However, to tip the scale in its favour, the BN election machinery has to go on overdrive as there is a serious deficit of Chinese support in the constituency.

"In the Chinese majority constituency of DUN Pasir Bedamar, the BN support was only about 28 percent while DAP has the advantage of 72 percent or 10,749 votes. With 57 percent of BN support coming from Changkat Jong, it is still not enough to offset the 10,749 votes advantage for DAP," he said.

DUN Pasir Bedamar and DUN Changkat Jong are two seats under the Teluk Intan parliamentary seat with BN winning Changkat Jong while Pasir Bedamar going to DAP in the GE13.

NEED TO INCREASE CHINESE SUPPORT

Therefore, BN has no other choice except to seek more support from the Chinese like what they did in the Kajang by-election where they were able to increase the Chinese support from 15 to 30 percent.

"Even when we lost by 7,313 votes in the last GE, don't forget the fact that we also won Teluk Intan in 2004 with a big majority. In the by-election in 1997, we lost Teluk Intan by 2,916 votes but in 1999 GE we captured back through Mah with 2,783 votes. In the 2004 GE, also through Mah we retained the seat with majority of 9,836 votes.

Only during 2008 and 2013 GE that they see the change in the voting pattern with the younger voters, especially those below 50 years old, voting for DAP.

DAP AT THE DISADVANTAGE?

Still, party strategists remain confident of the chances for BN to improve the outcome in the constituency as they believe DAP is in a disadvantaged position due to several national issues.

First, the water crisis in Selangor has left a bad impression on the Pakatan Rakyat (PR), which DAP is a part of the setup. Secondly, there is internal bickering within Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and the disagreement among opposition pact over the implementation of Hudud in Kelantan.

"This has led the people to question the effectiveness of PR. It is also my understanding that the Chinese voters are also very practical and discerning, hence they may back the BN," said the strategist who spoke on condition of anonymity.

In fact, he noted that PAS' adamant stand on moving a private bill on Hudud in Parliament would alienate the non-Malay support and DAP would have hard time to convince the voters on the issue though it is not in favour of Hudud.

Teluk Intan is mixed constituency with 60,620 voters, whereby 41.93 percent of the voters are Chinese, Malay (38.58 percent) and Indian (19.05 percent).

"Moreover, in any by-election, normally the turnout will be low. There are about 3,000 voters residing outside the constituency, therefore should the turnout drop from 80 percent in the last GE to 70 percent, it would definitely affect the overall result," added the strategist.

The other factor is that within DAP Perak, there are talks the party is finding it tough to pick the right candidate for the by-election due to the existence of two camps in Perak.

MAH SIEW KEONG TO BE RENOMINATED AS CANDIDATE?

In terms of BN's candidate, it is most likely that Gerakan president Datuk Mah Siew Keong will be re-nominated in the by-election.

Mah, 52, a local, and a former Teluk Intan MP (1999-2008), is considered BN's best choice for the seat despite losing to Seah in both the 2008 and 2013 GE.

Party insiders say although the party has recommended two candidates

one from Teluk Intan and the other from Kuala Lumpur

to the BN top leadership, it appears that Mah is the coalition's most winnable candidate.

Not only that, both the party's central committee and Perak state liaison committee have expressed their support for Mah, a former deputy minister, to contest the seat.

Mah is said to be seriously considering contesting the by-election.

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