

DAP's downfall in Teluk Intan came from being overconfident, say analysts
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By Jennifer Gomez

DAP's overconfidence in keeping Teluk Intan, and not voters' disillusionment with Pakatan Rakyat (PR), was the cause of the loss of the seat, say analysts.

They told The Malaysian Insider that the time frame of just a year after the 13th general election was too short for the electorate to be disappointed with PR over its handling of key issues mostly centred on the state of Selangor, or for Teluk Intan voters to "punish" the opposition coalition.

Moreover, not all Teluk Intan voters reside in Selangor, where PR is in its second term as the state government but is facing resentment over water shortages, the seizure of Malay and Iban Bibles and a controversial private expressway.

"One year of disillusionment pales in comparison to more than 60 years of what is essentially corrupt BN rule so I don't think this argument holds water," political analyst Dr Oh Ei Sun told The Malaysian Insider.

"The lower voter turnout is more the case of them thinking that this by-election would be a sure win for DAP," he added.

Instead, the analyst from Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies believed DAP lost to BN's superior election machinery on the ground.

"DAP usually wins by mass appeal but in a close race like this, the election machinery on the ground really matters, so DAP needs to work hard on strengthening this area," said Oh.

There were also claims that DAP's Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud candidature had caused unhappiness among the party's grassroots who had wanted a local, although this was quickly addressed by its leaders in the early days of the political newbie's campaigning.

Political analyst Khoo Kay Peng also said while some voters might have been disillusioned by PR's problems in Selangor as well as its poor handling of the contentious hudud issue, not all voters from the semi-urban seat are

currently living or working in the country's richest and most industrialised state.

He said one of the reasons that contributed to BN's victory was because rival DAP adopted the wrong strategy, adding the party appeared arrogant and overconfident in the run-up to the by-election.

"Their contention that 'a win was in the bag' and gloats over the huge number of people who attended their ceramah as a sign of victory were wrong," he said.

At its final ceramah on the eve of Saturday's polling, DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang claimed some 20,000 attended the event; at the same time, news portal Malaysiakini reported that only a measly 70 attended BN's ceramah.

"Towards the end, some leaders did warn that Dyana only had a 47% chance of winning and urged outstation voters to return but that message caught on too late," said Khoo.

Political newbie Dyana was narrowly defeated by BN's Datuk Mah Siew Keong 238 votes.

Mah, who is Gerakan president, obtained 20,157 votes against Dyana's 19,919. There were 550 spoilt votes.

Mah was a two-term Teluk Intan MP after winning the federal seat in the 1999 and 2004 general elections. But since then, he lost to M. Manogaran (in 2008 by 1,830 votes) and Seah Leong Peng in 2013, by 7,313 votes), both of DAP.

Voter turnout was poor this time at 66.7%, compared with 80.7% in GE13 and this proved detrimental to DAP as it was a sign that people do not take by-elections seriously.

"There have to be compelling reasons to return to vote and people don't do that for by-elections. This is unlike a general election, where people know there could be a change of government," said Monash University Malaysia's Professor James Chin.

Both Universiti Putra Malaysia's Dr Jayum Jawan and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak Dr Arnold Puyok also felt DAP lacked in efforts to convince outstation voters to return to Teluk Intan to vote.

Jayum was of the opinion that it was due to the spillover feel-good factor from the May 25 Bukit Gelugor by-election, where DAP easily won the seat,

while Puyok said DAP was overly focused on Dyana instead of local issues, which were the main concerns of the semi-urban electorate.

But DAP strategist Dr Ong Kian Ming said disillusionment with the performance of PR post-GE13 could not be discounted as cause of the lower voter turnout.

"Pakatan needs to consider the overall direction of the coalition moving forward to avoid voters abstaining from voting in the next GE because of disappointment with both BN and PR," he said.

Ong also did not believe the Teluk Intan by-election was because of voters reacting to problems within the Selangor PR government or the pact's inability to check partner PAS over its intention to implement hudud in Kelantan.

PAS's intention to put in place an Islamic penal code in the east coast state of Kelantan met with stiff resistance from DAP and Barisan Nasional Chinese-majority parties.

To date, the plan has been shelved pending a study by a joint committee comprising Putrajaya, PAS and the Kelantan government. – June 2, 2014.

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