

GE14: Beluran enjoys rapid development but MP wants more

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KOTA KINABALU: Although Beluran's name resembles the Malay word for "starving", nobody goes hungry in the sparsely populated parliamentary constituency of about 97,000 people.

Agriculture is the main industry, with oil palm trees filling most of the landscape. There is also the fishing industry, which has made the constituency famous for its giant shrimps.

According to Ronald Kiandee, the sole non-Muslim Umno MP, the majority of people in Beluran are quite well off, thanks to the oil palm industry.

Kiandee, who has served the constituency for almost 20 years, said many were smallholders and landowners who benefit from government programmes, receiving agricultural input like fertiliser, seeds and nursery management.

"If you look at some of the houses in far-flung villages, you will be surprised that they are made of concrete and a lot bigger than many houses found in cities."

Over the last five years, Beluran town, which is the centre of the constituency, has also seen rapid development including the construction of a new fire station, a sports complex and a 140-unit people's housing programme.

Roads to many of the villages are paved, and although some still lag behind, Kiandee said it was only a matter of time before the rest of Beluran constituency could enjoy sustained water and electricity as well as land connectivity.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Najib Razak, he said, the constituency had received numerous projects aimed at helping the rural folk, who have begun to notice the changes.

“You can see it, the people can feel it. The villages are enjoying electricity, and solar hybrids are everywhere in Beluran. But there are still villages that are deprived of everything, and this is a problem,” he said to FMT.

Kiandee has been going to the ground since the last election to serve the people.

The Dewan Rakyat deputy speaker said many who voted for the opposition in the previous election did so not because they thought the opposition was any good, but because development had not reached them.

He said the younger generation was much more emotional when it came to development issues, and many had even approached him to give him a piece of their minds.

“The older generations can accept this, but the younger generation, they have gone out of the district and seen development elsewhere, and they wonder why this doesn’t happen here.

“So this becomes a big issue and they are discouraged from voting for the government,” he said.

Much of Beluran, which has Sugut and Labuk as its state constituencies, is still covered with forest, and the land opened is mostly used for oil palm plantations. The topography, which is mostly hilly and separated by rivers, makes it difficult to build roads to rural areas without using large sums of money.

The constituency has two full districts, Beluran and Telupid, and one sub-district in Sugut, each situated at least 75km from the other.

The population are Kadazandusun, Sungai, Tidong, Bajau, Suluk, Rungus, Brunei, Dumpas and Chinese.

While those living nearer towns enjoy better infrastructure, those in the rural areas are still in dire need of basic resources such as proper health services and good education facilities.

The flying doctor service, which once served Beluran's most rural villagers, was stopped two years ago, depriving them of basic healthcare.

Although the health ministry has not provided alternatives to this service, Kiandee said it was supposed to be a temporary measure and should not have continued for more than 40 years.

"The money spent on the flying doctor service could have been used to build 30 or 40 rural clinics in my constituency.

"Since the service was scrapped, they should have a backup. They said mobile clinics will be provided but I don't see any," he said.

This is what frustrates Kiandee, who said department officials rarely go to the ground to check on the needs of the people before drafting budgets.

He said another example of this was the clinic in Kg Sungai-Sungai which was built more than 20 years ago.

"Over the years, because of constant floods in the area, people finally moved away. And what did the ministry do? Every year, they improved the clinic instead of moving it together with the population.

"This is why the people are upset. The opposition does not go to the ground but they still get the votes because people are protesting against the implementation of government programmes.

"Youngsters are angry not because they like the opposition, but because they are frustrated. I don't see the opposition coming to the villages except during the last few months, giving out all sorts of promises.

"I told the villagers that it doesn't work that way. They can be mad and critical of the government, but voting for the oppositions is not the answer. You won't get water supply by voting for the opposition."

Kiandee, who is hoping to retain the seat for a fifth term, said although he has done much for the constituency, there are still many more things he wants to do.

His list includes more rural clinics, a new fire station for Telupid, rural hostels for schoolchildren and better facilities in schools.

“I am happy with the development in Beluran, but in my heart I want more because we need more. I want the relevant ministries to go to the ground and solve the problems,” he said.

In terms of challenges in the coming election, Kiandee said he had seen Parti Warisan Sabah moving around, as well as PKR and a few smaller local opposition parties.

“To me, the more the merrier. They have every right to contest and to promote their parties. At the end of the day, it is the people who will vote.

“As far as I am concerned, I have served the people well and will continue to do so,” he said.

Meanwhile, local Warisan supporters said despite decades of Barisan Nasional representation, Beluran was still riddled with problems including land issues while the representatives were seen as aloof and unconcerned.

Although they agreed that Kiandee was a good representative, they said he was stretching himself too much and that it was difficult to meet with him.

“The assemblymen are worse. James is focusing too much on his own village while Asang is almost impossible to see and will only show his face come election time,” they said, referring to Sugut assemblyman James Ratib and Labuk assemblyman Michael Metah Asang.

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