

## **What's in store for battle-scarred Tapah?**

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**By Robin Augustin**

PETALING JAYA: Most people now see Tapah as a peaceful town where tourists stop for refreshment before making the climb to Cameron Highlands, but just five years ago, the MIC stronghold was the scene of an election contest associated with alleged political violence and even murder.

The body of K Murugan, an aide to PKR candidate K Vasantha Kumar, was found floating in a disused mining pool on polling day, May 5, 2013. On days prior to the discovery, Vasantha had lodged several police reports alleging threats of violence made against members of his party during the campaign period.

Saravanan dismisses as irrelevant both Mahathir's influence with voters and Pakatan's partnership with Hindraf and the New Generation Party to gain Indian votes.

After the election, he went to court to get the result annulled, citing incidences of political violence and alleging election fraud. The case was eventually dismissed and the court ordered him to pay costs to the plaintiffs – Tapah MP M Saravanan, the Election commission and returning officer Razali Bakar.

Whether or not there will be violence or complaints of violence during the GE14 campaign period is anyone's guess, but the race is expected to be stiff, given the scramble for Malay votes between Barisan Nasional, Pakatan Harapan and PAS.

Figures from GE13 show that Malays account for 47% of the 45,000-odd voters in Tapah. Chinese make up 32%, Indians 20% and Orang Asli 1%.

Saravanan, who is deputy minister for youth and sports, had a comfortable 7,927-vote majority in 2013 and BN is expected to entrust him with defending the seat.

Pakatan has assigned PPBM for the contest in the belief that it makes good sense to field a Malay candidate in a Malay-majority area.

According to PPBM's Tapah chief, Mohd Yunus Yusop, Pakatan was also banking on PPBM chairman Mahathir Mohamad's popularity and voters' reception of the opposition coalition's promise of change.

"We hope people realise that PH is focused on reducing the cost of living and preparing Malaysia for the coming years in terms of creating jobs and ensuring that houses are affordable for future generations," he said.

However, he acknowledged challenges from BN's huge resources and the rural folk's distrust of DAP. He said Pakatan would have to work hard to discredit the BN propaganda about the Chinese-based party's alleged aim to take control of the government in the event of a PH victory.

"But our chances of wresting Tapah from BN are good," he claimed.

Saravanan also claimed that his chances were good, saying voters were aware that the government had served the people well.

Rejecting the allegations of fraud in the last election, he said: "If we really cheated as claimed, why would we cheat just in Tapah? We could have cheated in every constituency to maintain our two-third majority in parliament."

Saravanan dismissed as irrelevant both Mahathir's influence with voters and Pakatan's partnership with Hindraf and the New Generation Party to gain Indian votes.

He said those would be relevant only where elected representatives weren't performing. This wasn't the case with Tapah, he added.

"Mahathir also can't get votes from the Indians," he said. "They won't buy what he is selling because life for Indians under Mahathir wasn't good. As for the Malay votes, Najib has done much for the community and I see them continuing to back him."

Bersih deputy chairman Shahrul Aman Mohd Saari said the election watchdog would closely monitor the situation on the ground and encourage people in Tapah to volunteer as observers.

Yunus said Pakatan too would be working hard to ensure a free and fair election by spreading information on the roles and rights of election volunteers and polling agents.

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