Can Kedah UMNO retain state in GE14?

ALOR SETAR: All political parties are now geared towards preparing for the 14th general election, which many expect will be held next year.

Many also expect the coming election to be more challenging than the 13th general election, which was held in May 2013.

In Kedah, for example, the menteri besar crisis early this year could either be a stumbling block or just a storm in the cup for the Barisan Nasional (BN) state government.

BN won 21 of the 36 state seats in the 13th general election, while the remaining seats were won by PAS (nine), PKR (four) and DAP (two).

There are 15 parliamentary seats in Kedah, with 10 under BN, PKR (four) and PAS (one).

In the 13th general election, much of BN and UMNO's win was influenced by the role played by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. His influence enabled BN to wrest back the state from the opposition.

His son, Datuk Seri Mukhriz, was appointed the Kedah Menteri Besar, a promise by BN if the coalition was able to wrest back the state.

Mukhriz won the Ayer Hitam state seat, considered a PAS stronghold, with a majority of more than 2,000 votes.

That was the story then, as Mukhriz is now no more in the same boat with BN.

He is now with Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), having joined the party after being expelled from UMNO last June, together with then UMNO deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Prior to that, on Feb 3, Mukhriz stepped down as Kedah Menteri Besar and was replaced by Kedah UMNO deputy liaison chief Datuk Seri Ahmad Bashah Md Hanipah, a leadership change which led to a political crisis in the state.

The opposition has been taking advantage of the situation and claimed that BN would fall in the coming general election.

The prediction by the opposition is not a problem, but what is important is how prepared is Kedah UMNO to face the challenges in ensuring the state government remains strong.

Ahmad Bashah, who underwent minor surgery over an intestinal complication, has now recovered and continues to steer the state leadership, as well as counter attacks from the opposition.

Recently, when opening the Kedah UMNO Convention, he said Kedah UMNO was determined to ensure a two-thirds win for the party in the coming general election.

To realise that, he said the focus would be on enhancing party solidarity and election machinery.

Commenting the matter, head of the Political, Security and International Affairs Cluster, National Council of Professors, Prof Datuk Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak said Kedah UMNO should focus on PPBM and to not look down on the new party.

This, he said, was because two former key UMNO leaders from Kedah were now in PPBM and the possibility of their followers, who were still UMNO members, supporting them in silence.

Director of the Centre for Malaysian Political Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Dr Kamarul Zaman Yusoff also said the UMNO should not look down on the capabilities of the opposition.

"What we are worried about is the support of the young people for UMNO, which need serious attention on how to get back their support for the party," he added.

Kamarul Zaman said the votes from these young people and the fence-sitters could determine UMNO's fate in the next general election.

He said Ahmad Bashah, since appointed the menteri besar, was not involved in personal issues, which was good for the party as voters would want a 'clean man' as a leader.

"National issues can also influence the local political scenario and because of that the state leadership also has to resolve issues which are considered national issues," he added.

He also welcomed the Barakah programme introduced by the Kedah government to help the poor, especially farmers, as it give the state government a good image.

"Do not play down people's issues. Be their hero and help them because this will be translated into votes in the general election," he added.

As such, he said the coming UMNO general assembly should find ways to address the people's problems and for UMNO to remain relevant. - Bernama