

# Ramli a BN masterstroke or mistake?

**CAMERON HIGHLANDS:** Will Barisan Nasional's move in selecting Ramli Md Nor as its candidate for the Cameron Highlands by-election prove to be a masterstroke? Or will it backfire?

The selection of Ramli, who was the highest-ranking Orang Asli policeman before his retirement last year, has been described as a bold move. Many, including Pakatan Harapan leaders, had expected BN to field a "recycled" candidate, or a familiar face, in the polls.

BN, following a string of defeats in by-elections, was aware of the significance of this by-election, the first to be held in a BN-held state following the 14th General Election.

A defeat could spell disaster for the former ruling coalition.

BN insiders said Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail faced a tough time convincing BN's top leadership, including MIC, that Ramli was the party's winnable candidate. The coalition had planned to allow MIC contest the seat it had been winning since 2004.

A source said: "Naming a recycled candidate, or a senior party member (to contest the seat), would have allowed their opponent (PH) to study and dig up information on the person's past.

"We do not see people (during

campaigning) sharing or posting controversial remarks about Ramli, his past (as a policeman) or political-related matters on him.

"Many see him as someone clean with high integrity. He had nothing to do with BN's defeat in GE14, 1Malaysia Development Bhd issues or political figures until the day he was named the party's candidate for the by-election."

Unlike during GE14, when the selection of BN candidates appeared to have been politically-motivated, the source said, Ramli appeared to be a "winnable local candidate" as he was well-liked by the people, despite lacking experience.

Universiti Putra Malaysia political analyst Dr Syed Agil Syed Alsagoff described the selection of the Cameron Highlands native as something unique, which could lead to a new voting trend in the constituency.

He said since Malays and Orang Asli made up the majority of voters at 54 per cent, they might prefer a local candidate and a fresh face to represent them in Parliament.

"BN did its homework before naming Ramli, who has a clean record. Based on previous by-elections, we noticed a trend of voters preferring a local or some-



Ramli Md Nor

one close to the grassroots. Whenever there are issues or controversies (plaguing the PH government), voters tend to support the opposition as a sign of protest."

Professor Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmood, a political analyst and law lecturer from International Islamic University Malaysia, said fence-sitters would likely vote for Ramli.

"It's a good strategy. Malays in Felda schemes will vote for BN along with Pas, and the Orang Asli could be the king makers, and since the candidate is one of them, they will have faith in BN.

"Indian and Chinese votes will



Dr Syed Agil Syed Alsagoff

go to PH, but there is a slim chance of the Orang Asli supporting PH. I guess the margin of votes will be similar to the last general election," he told the *New Straits Times*.

There are concerns in PH of its candidate, M. Manogaran's chances at the polls, following controversies plaguing the coalition during campaigning.

A PKR insider said blunders — including the *kuih* remark by Manogaran, PH senator Bob Manolan's "threat" to Orang Asli village chiefs and alleged use of government vehicle — might upset some voters.

"There has been minimal damage control from PH. Tanah Rata



Professor Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmood

is seen as a PH stronghold but our concern is in Jelai, where the party's machinery has been giving extra attention.

"Sadly, some of our (PH) events saw low turnouts and we are unsure if the machinery has been doing its job on the ground.

"We need to have a firm stand on matters concerning roads in Orang Asli settlements, new generation of Felda homes and stop beating around the bush.

"When we highlight a certain issue (in the by-election), it is not about exposing it but also identifying solutions. Manogaran is going all out to win, but the people around him must not ruin his chances (of winning)."