

ELECTION 2008: Swiftlet issue may hold key to victory

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KUALA TERENGGANU: Swiftlets may just be the clincher in the match-up for the Bandar state seat between Barisan Nasional incumbent Toh Chin Yaw and Party Keadilan Rakyat rookie Dr Abdul Manaf Che Mat. It is an open secret that most city residents are against the growing number of 'swiftlet hotels' but quite a number of entrepreneurs are finding it a lucrative business.

Dr Manaf had a meeting with some residents of Jalan Tok Lam yesterday.

He said swiftlet-rearing issue, unresolved for the last decade, would be something to ponder for 18,973 registered voters here.

Although many complaints were lodged with government agencies, no action had been taken while the swiftlet colonies continue to grow.

Jalan Tok Lam resident Ong Pok Kok, 54, said the swiftlet nuisance has been the bane of his family for the past five years.

"The noise they make day and night is enough to make people crazy and that does not include the stench from their droppings.

"If only I had someplace else to go, I would have packed my bags and left a long time ago but this has been my home since 1967."

Dr Manaf said the grouses of the residents should have been dealt with quickly.

"Yes, we will be harping on this issue during the party's meet-the-people sessions and ceramah. Based on my observation, most people are unhappy over the non-action by the relevant authorities. Although no licences have been issued by the local authorities, swiftlet hotels are growing in number," he said yesterday.

"As it is a nuisance to the people, the government should instead allocate an area for swiftlet farming. It is not only a problem in Bandar but everywhere in Kuala Terengganu."

He said swiftlet hotels are mostly located in Chinese dominant areas especially in Kampung Cina in the Bandar constituency.

"Thirty nine per cent of voters in the Bandar seat are Chinese and Indians, and I believe this unresolved issue will sway a few percentage of the votes to PKR."

Toh, who is going for a second-term, said everything was being done to regulate the swiftlet and bird nest industry in the state.

He said it was just a matter of time before the local authorities came up with guidelines for rearing swiftlets. -- By Ajitpal Singh and Zainuddin Muhammad