

10 MAY 1996

Asahan (focus)

BN EXPECTS TO WIN ASAHAN SEAT WITHOUT CONTEST

By: Mohd Zabidi Osman

MELAKA, May 10 (Bernama) -- The Barisan Nasional (BN) expects to retain the Bukit Asahan state assembly seat in Melaka in the June 23 by-election without contest.

The likelihood of a BN walkover has become apparent with the latest political development arising from Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) President Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's announcement of him and other party members returning to the Umno fold en bloc.

BN's Datuk N Arunasalam, whose death in a road accident in Petaling Jaya last month caused the by-election, won the seat in the 1995 general election with a thumping majority of 4,722 votes.

All three main opposition parties -- PAS, DAP and S46 -- contacted today said they had not made any decision about contesting the by-election.

Only S46 had claimed to be ready for the by-election, but in view of Tengku's Razaleigh announcement, the party can instead be expected to help the BN to retain the seat.

S46 State Deputy Chairman Samad Abdullah said the party's election machinery was all geared up and a candidate had already been chosen.

"In the present situation, we leave it to the party's central committee," he said referring to Tengku Razaleigh's announcement.

PAS, which teamed up with S46 in the last elections, has not made any decision yet.

PAS State Commissioner Mursidul Salleh said the party would have to wait for a decision from the its central committee.

Melaka DAP will only make its decision at a party meeting next week, said its chairman Sim Thong Him.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, during his visit to Melaka last week, said the BN would certainly field a candidate from the MIC although the majority of the voters in the constituency are Malays.

Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Zin Abdul Ghani said although BN was confident of retaining the seat, an intensive campaign would be carried out to ensure a better majority compared to the previous election.

MIC President Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu is expected to name the BN candidate during a meeting with the state MIC leaders here on Monday.

It has been widely been speculated here that the likely candidate is State MIC Secretary R Raghavan.

Political observers here are of the opinion that although the Opposition might not be contesting, there is the possibility of independent candidates trying their luck.

The Elections Commission has fixed Nomination Day on May 23.

The Asahan state constituency has a total of 11,191 voters, the majority of whom are Malays who make up 52.2 percent, Chinese 30.8 percent and Indian 12.3 percent. --BERNAMA

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