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S46-Parliament (News Analysis)

OPPOSITION STRENGTH IN DEWAN RAKYAT ERODED

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- The dissolution of Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) has eroded the opposition strength in the Dewan Rakyat which will convene next week.

The opposition stands to lose six of its 29 representatives in the House with the crossover to Umno of the S46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and other MPs of the party which voted at an extraordinary general assembly yesterday to dissolve to enable its members to join Umno en bloc.

Tengku Razaleigh, who is the Member of Parliament for Gua Musang, is expected to hand over about 200,000 membership application forms from his supporters to Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tomorrow.

"It's up to the Speaker," said Tengku Razaleigh to Bernama when asked about their seating position in the Dewan Rakyat if their applications to join Umno were accepted.

The 192-member Dewan Rakyat will begin its two-month Budget session from Oct 14. The Budget for next year is scheduled to be tabled by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on Oct 25.

With the crossover by the former S46 members, the Barisan Nasional, in particular Umno, will be further strengthened in the Dewan.

It is normal for the Speaker's office to be informed of the entry of new members into a party in the Dewan so that the necessary adjustments could be made to the seating arrangement.

Umno, which will hold its four-day general assembly from Wednesday, at present has 90 members in the Dewan Rakyat. The BN as a whole has 163 members including 30 from the MCA, MIC 7, Gerakan 7, and 10 from the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak.

After having voted with the opposition or having abstained over the last eight years, the S46 members are now ready to be government backbenchers.

Tengku Razaleigh, who had said that he was willing to be just an ordinary Umno member, added that he and the others would abide by the BN whip.

"Before, I spoke for my party as its president. When it made decisions, I have of course to implement them.

"Now we have decided to dissolve our party and join a new party and we are now bound by the decisions of the party (Umno)," he had said after the S46 was officially dissolved yesterday.

S46 was registered on May 5, 1989, a year after the party was formed.

He said based on the statements by BN component party leaders, he felt that they welcomed the entry of S46 members into Umno.

"Certainly when we are united, not only Umno becomes stronger but also the Barisan Nasional," he said.

The opposition strength in the Dewan Rakyat has now been reduced to just 23

-- DAP 9, PAS 7 and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) 7.

According to observers, with the crossover of the S46 members, the Barisan Nasional has strengthened its chances of regaining power in PAS-held Kelantan.

In the general election last year, the BN won two of the 14 parliamentary seats and seven of the 43 state seats in Kelantan, after being completely wiped out in 1990.

With the 11 assemblymen from S46, the BN now has 18 state seats to PAS' 25.

The Peringat parliamentary seat is represented by Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa and the Jeli seat by Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed.

Tengku Razaleigh said PAS, which severed links with S46 over its move to join Umno, was now worried over the latest developments.

"Even though they claim they are strong they are not prepared to test their strength. They don't have the courage to dissolve the assembly," he said. -- BERNAMA

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