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Barisan going all out to ensure big win in Permatang

KUALA SELANGOR, Wed. - Permatang, an obscure State constituency on the west coast of Selangor, has never been the focus of elections. But things are different this time.

Tomorrow, the fate of Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, who has been named as the next Selangor Menteri Besar, will hinge on the outcome of the by-election for the seat.

The fate of the former Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister lies in the hands of 18,329 farmers, fishermen, traders and estate workers from 15 villages and oil palm estates that made up the Permatang State constituency.

While many believe that Abu Hassan's victory is a forgone conclusion, nothing is definite until the votes are counted.

Pas candidate for the seat Mohd Maskuri Mardzuki, 41, maybe an underdog but even Abu Hassan himself, who is a local, having been born in Kampung Bukit Belimbing 56 years ago, never dismissed his potential to upset the scale.

Abu Hassan has been hitting the campaign trail soon after the nomination day on May 20 from morning to dusk and until late this evening, the last day for campaigning, he is still seen hopping from one village to another in his contested constituency.

Abu Hassan can be considered fortunate because his campaign mate for the Kuala Selangor Parliamentary seat is his former political secretary, Datuk Jamaluddin Adnan.

Both of them admit that they feel very comfortable with each other and thus there has been no clashes between them throughout the campaign period.

Jamaluddin was very candid when asked, why, even in areas outside his contested constituency, Abu Hassan was the one who made the speeches instead of him who is candidate for the parliamentary seat.

"I am not important. I am only contesting to fill the seat left vacant by Abu Hassan.

"All this campaign and hard work is about making sure that Abu Hassan wins and he must win convincingly.

"The people of Kuala Selangor, especially in the Permatang State constituency must show that they respect the trust given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Abu Hassan to lead Selangor in its march towards realising its vision of becoming a fully industrialised State by the year 2005," he said.

For an area that has never seen any opposition Member of Parliament or State Assemblyman since independence, the campaigns for the by-elections, called to legalise Abu Hassan's appointment as the next Selangor Menteri Besar, are surprisingly intense.

Throughout the campaign period, not less than six Ministers trekked to Kuala Selangor, meeting the people at clinics, schools, the market and surau to explain about the BN Government policies and development programmes.

Not to be outdone, Pas which believes that the party has a slim chance of winning either one or both of the seats, imported several of its big names like president Fadzil Noor, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Mat Nik Aziz, Hadi Awang and the vocal Mohamad Sabu at its public ceramah.

Abu Hassan who stood in the Kuala Selangor parliamentary seat in the

1995 general election garnered 28,287 votes to win with a 23,460 majority against S46 Amin Hussaini Abdul Manan who only managed to get 4,827 votes.

Jamaluddin, standing in Permatang State constituency then, convincingly beat Pas candidate Harullah Junid @ Amat Dollah Mat Junit with 7,276 majority with 9,877 votes.

Says a BN party worker: "We have to work hard because we are not only facing the challenges posed by Pas but also to undo damages done by some leaders from the State BN component parties."

He refuses to give details, but said that quite a number of leaders are not happy with Dr Mahathir's choice of Abu Hassan as the Menteri Besar-designate as it had cast doubt on the cleanliness and trustworthiness of other Umno State Assemblymen.

The Kuala Selangor BN machinery, he said, has received information that some people have told voters especially in the Permatang state constituency that they need not come out on the polling day as their votes will not make any difference as Abu Hassan is guaranteed to win.

The move, he believes, is not to so much to ensure that Mohd Maksuri will win, but to substantially lessen Abu Hassan's majority.

"For this people making sure that Abu Hassan wins with a small majority is like sending a message to Dr Mahathir that he is not the right choice as he does not enjoy full confidence at the grassroots level."

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