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Kelantan-BN (News Focus)

BN SEES CLOSE FIGHT IN KELANTAN BUT CONFIDENT OF WINNING

KOTA BAHARU, Nov 23 (Bernama) -- Attention in the country's 10th general election is expected to be on Kelantan as to whether the Barisan Nasional (BN) can recapture the state PAS has ruled for the past 10 years.

Umno leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, have previously stated their confidence that BN could regain the state in the Nov 29 polls.

This was based on the increasing support of the people for the BN since Dr Mahathir, the Umno president, passed the party's leadership baton in Kelantan to Tengku Razaleigh, the influential prince, on June 20.

Since the appointment, Tengku Razaleigh has been able to get Umno members and Malays in the state to close ranks after the 1987 party split which led to the Kelantan prince forming Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46).

Unity in Kelantan Umno is now at its strongest, since PAS captured the state from BN in the 1990 general election, after S46 was dissolved and its members absorbed back into Umno.

Determined to win back Kelantan, BN is going all out in taking on PAS which is led by Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

Kelantan BN chairman Datuk Annuar Musa said recapturing the state is not an impossibility but he acknowledged it would not be an easy task.

"This is because PAS is the incumbent in power in the state," he told Bernama at his residence in Peringat, here, in a recent interview.

Annuar, who is Rural Development Minister, said if the BN regained Kelantan after 10 years, it would be a record performance since previously it took the coalition 18 years to recapture the state after PAS won it in 1959.

PAS took 12 years to regain the state. This came about from the split in Umno in 1987 resulting in the birth of S46 which PAS then teamed up with to make a clean sweep of all seats in the state in the 1990 general election.

Annuar said he had predicted in 1990 itself that BN would take at least 10 years to recoup from the whitewash it suffered in Kelantan.

He said Umno had to overcome five factors -- the royalty, religion, state administrative officers, Tengku Razaleigh and PAS -- in order to recapture Kelantan.

"The key to all the factors is Tengku Razaleigh and that was why I thought then that we had no choice but to bring back Tengku Razaleigh into Umno," he said.

With Tengku Razaleigh back in Umno, Annuar said only the PAS factor now stood in the Kelantan Umno's way.

Polling day on Monday will be Kelantan Umno's test of winning over the electorate and to free the state from the PAS grip.

He also sees Umno as having the best chance this time to recapture the state compared to the 1995 general election.

"We must work hard to ensure victory because the PAS we face today is different from the one in 1990.

"The PAS then had no resources unlike the position they are in now," he said.

Of the 43 state seats in Kelantan, Annuar believed BN and PAS were about even with at least 12 seats each and the rest to decide the final outcome.

He said unity in Kelantan Umno has been proven when no major problem

arose in determining the BN's list of candidates to stand in the general election this time.

Annuar also said he did not think the issue concerning former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would interest the electorate in Kelantan.

He said PAS was unlikely to make Anwar an issue since Anwar had never been a factor in Kelantan.

He said even the cooperation between PAS and Parti Keadilan Nasional in Kelantan had not been an honest one with PAS furthering its interests by making use of Keadilan.

Keadilan was only given seats to contest which PAS did not want, Annuar said.

BN and PAS are in straight fights in 40 of the 43 seats, BN to face Keadilan in two and only one seat is a three-cornered fight between BN, PAS and Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia (Akim).

BN held 17 of the 43 seats when the Kelantan state legislative assembly was dissolved on Nov 11.

-- BERNAMA

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