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Ghani: Choosing the most taxing part of the job

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JOHOR BARU, Fri. - Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman has described the task of selecting Barisan Nasional candidates for the general election as the "most difficult job" of being a Menteri Besar.

Ghani, who took over from Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as Johor Menteri Besar in April 1995, said this was the first time he had come up with a list of BN candidates for Johor.

"It's a tough job ... It's never easy dropping a name in favour of someone else. I don't relish doing it," said the Menteri Besar.

"But the decision will be made in the best interest of Umno and the BN and I am certain all concerned, including those dropped from the list, would support the chosen candidates," he said.

Ghani, speaking to reporters at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the new R3 million Johor Association for Mentally Retarded Children centre here today, said he would meet BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur on Monday to discuss Johor's line-up.

"I will announce the full list of candidates on Tuesday morning at my official residence. All the candidates will also be present," he said.

Yesterday, the Menteri Besar said the list would contain a good mix of "old and new faces", adding that the main selection criterion was that the candidates be acceptable to the voters.

Of the BN parties in Johor, Umno controls 25 State seats, MCA 11 and MIC and Gerakan two each. As for the parliamentary seats, Umno has 13 seats, MCA six and MIC one.

Ghani was confident Johor BN members would close ranks after the announcement of the candidates although it was normal for those dropped from the list to sulk over their fate for "a day or two".

"But I am certain there will be no split in BN unity. This has always been the Johor tradition," he added.

On trouble spots for the BN in Johor, Ghani said the State seat of Endau near Mersing was one of them due to the large population of Pas supporters from Kelantan and Terengganu who had settled there.

He pointed out, however, that the BN would eventually overcome the Pas challenge.

Similarly, in Parit Bakar near Muar, he said there was also some support for Keadilan but stressed that Johor BN was ready to counter this.

Ghani noted that the DAP was also wooing Chinese voters to wrest Maharani in Muar from the BN.

"But the support from the Chinese towards the BN has been very forthcoming. They are solid supporters of the BN," he said.

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