

09/06/2000

Barisan only looking at the margin of victory in Teluk Kemang

Kamarulzaman Salleh

THE Barisan Nasional goes into the Teluk Kemang parliamentary by-election tomorrow, buoyed by its victory in the Sanggang State by-election on April 1.

The ruling party will be going all out to prove that the Sanggang win was no fluke, a fact underlined by BN chairman and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad after opening the MIC general assembly last month.

Sanggang may have signalled the end of opposition victories at the Nov 29 polls, something that the Prime Minister has alluded to.

Deputy Umno president and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who led the BN charge in Sanggang, is doing the same in Teluk Kemang.

With him at the helm, the BN is confident of taking the seat which it won in last year's general election, the only difference being the margin of victory.

Going by statements by BN leaders, the coalition expects a bigger win than the last time around.

The Opposition says it has a fair chance of winning.

Crucial to victory by either side are the issues which have been raised so far.

Since nomination day on May 30, both the BN and the Opposition had been campaigning hard to woo the 66,646 registered voters in Teluk Kemang.

The by-election sees S. Sothinathan of the BN in a straight fight with Keadilan's information chief Ruslan Kasim.

It comes in the wake of the death of former MP S.A. Anpalagan on April 28.

On record, Keadilan is no match for the BN.

The BN boasts of a proven track record while Keadilan, formed following the sacking of former Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in November 1998, is considered very new and untested.

The Teluk Kemang parliamentary constituency comprising five State constituencies - Chembong, Si Rusa, Linggi, Lukut and Pasir Panjang - has always been a BN stronghold.

The BN's outstanding power-sharing concept involving its multi-racial component parties has appealed to the constituents of Teluk Kemang all these years.

It is bound to continue to do so in years to come, given the manner in which BN parties have come together to challenge the opposition.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is leading the BN campaign, has praised component parties for rallying behind the MIC candidate.

This is despite the Opposition fielding a Malay candidate to take advantage of the constituency's Malay voter majority.

The BN has charged the opposition with harping on racial sentiments and the Japanese viral encephalitis outbreak in Bukit Pelandok, Lukut, last year.

Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail has hit out at the BN for not doing much to adequately compensate those affected by the outbreak.

This was, however, disputed by Health Minister and MCA vice-president

Datuk Chua Jui Meng who said the Government had spent more than RM31 million to help affected pig farmers and residents.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik charged yesterday that the Opposition had only harped on the JE issue without having "lifted even a finger" to help them.

Leaders leaving Keadilan have charged that the opposition was not holding together in its campaign. Any crack in the opposition armour may affect its chances at the ballot box.

Voters, however, generally do not want to rock the boat following the BN's outstanding Nov 29 general election victory, not only in the constituency, but in the State where it took all seven parliamentary and 32 State seats.

"The people have been happy for so long, living in peace which they are actually enjoying. I don't see the need for me to change the present system to a relatively new and untested one," said a voter.

He was, however, quick to point out that there were bound to be mistakes and weaknesses but these things happened in every political organisation.

He added that the economic slowdown in 1997 was the biggest ever challenge the Government had faced and that it had managed to steer the country out of it.

Even the international community had appreciated Malaysia's handling of the situation.

"I'm convinced that the present Government has done a lot for the country," he said.

"I feel it is not right for me to reject them after what they have done all these years including achieving the country's Independence," added the voter who will cast his vote in the Si Rusa State constituency.

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