

BN gears up for battle

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Muhammad: Dr M to name candidate soon

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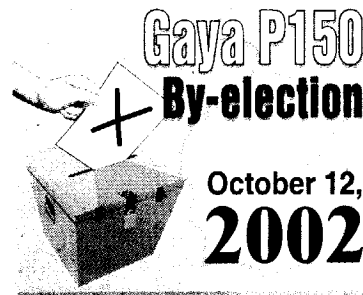
KUALA LUMPUR: Barisan Nasional by-election co-ordinator Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib will be in Kota Kinabalu next week to oversee Barisan's preparation to defend the Gaya parliamentary seat.

He said the by-election committee at both federal and state level had been formed even before the dates were announced.

"I will be receiving a report soon from the component parties in Sabah Barisan on the prevailing situation," he said in an interview.

Muhammad said he would forward the report to Barisan chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"He will name the candidate soon.



At the moment there is no decision yet on which component party will be given the job," he added.

Muhammad said it did not matter which party contested.

"At the end of the day, it will be Barisan and not any other party which will defend the seat."

Former chief minister and Sabah

Progressive Party (SAPP) president Datuk Yong Teck Lee had to vacate the seat after losing an election petition.

Muhammad said he had also requested Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) leaders to remind the voters that it was no longer an opposition party.

In the 1999 general election, PBS candidate Johny Goh Chn Lok polled 11,198 votes to Yong's 15,315 in a three-cornered fight.

The PAS candidate lost his deposit when he could only muster about 700 votes.

Ironically, it was a PBS petition which caused Yong to lose his state seat of Likas which led to his disqualification as Gaya MP.

Muhammad also said he had activated Barisan's national by-election machinery.

He did not rule out a three-way fight for the seat.

"We know DAP and Parti Keadilan Nasional will be there. It will help us if both of them contest against us," he added.

It is learnt that the seat will be given to SAPP.

"Barisan has yet to bring PBS into the picture as it has just rejoined the coalition," a source said.

In a related development, Gerakan will be liaising with Sabah Barisan and SAPP on sending a team to help out in Gaya.

"It is unfortunate that the seat had been declared vacant but if that is the law, we have to follow that," said Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik after the party's central committee meeting yesterday.