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By-Elections (wrap-up)

BN AND PAS HEAVYWEIGHTS MID-WAY THROUGH CAMPAIGN

By: Jamaluddin Muhammad

ALOR SETAR, July 14 (Bernama) -- Should an emergency occur in the country right now, the best possible place to hold a cabinet meeting is here where almost all the cabinet members are campaigning for the Barisan Nasional in the Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit state by-elections.

Opposition leaders from PAS, Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and Keadilan have found their way here too minus the DAP which had made a stand to stay away as it did not want to be associated with PAS' Islamic state struggle.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is leading the BN campaign, has been in either Pendang or Anak Bukit every day since nomination day last Wednesday, except for last Thursday when he had to fulfil his official commitment in the federal capital.

The opposition campaign is led by acting PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

As the campaigning reached the midway mark today, leaders from both sides had touched on a wide range of issues on why the 53,128 voters in Pendang and 19,399 in Anak Bukit should choose them.

The BN, among others, asked the voters to consider the development, peace and prosperity which the coalition has brought to the country.

BN leaders also asked the voters to reject extremism, unfair treatment against women, unfair ala-PAS hudud laws and the failure of PAS to govern Kelantan and Terengganu.

The opposition, on the other hand, are banking on sympathy votes following the death of Pendang and Anak Bukit elected representative Datuk Fadzil Noor, who was also the PAS president and opposition leader, on June 23.

They called on the voters to ponder on Fadzil's contribution in the Dewan Rakyat, the state assembly and the two constituencies, apart from trumpeting the same old issues of malpractice, corruption, Internal Security Act (ISA) and a bit on the sacked deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue.

The by-elections, considered very rare in that they will be held simultaneously on July 18, are also coincidentally taking place during the durian season.

The king of fruit, which used to cost around RM1 per kg before the nominations, are now fetching up to RM5 per kg now.

Even the house rental from RM80 to RM150 a month in Pendang had sky-rocketed to RM1,000 to RM2,500 for two weeks now. The various parties had rented the houses for their operations centres and accommodation for their workers.

The leaders from both sides are expected to intensify their campaigns in the next few days to win the hearts and minds of the voters to cross over to "dacing" or the "moon".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who rarely set foot on any by-election battleground except for the Johor Baharu parliamentary by-election in the mid 80's, will be in Pendang and Anak Bukit tomorrow.

Datuk Othman Abdul (BN) will face Dr Mohamed Hayati Othman (PAS) in Pendang while Datuk Zakaria Said (BN) will take on Haji Amiruddin Hamzah (PAS) in Anak Bukit.

-- BERNAMA

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