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BN retains Gaya with huge increase in majority

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KOTA KINABALU, Sat. - Barisan Nasional tonight retained the Gaya parliamentary seat with almost a three-fold increase in majority despite a low voter turnout of 44.73 per cent, believed to be the lowest ever in Malaysia's by-election history.

Liew Teck Chan collected 15,639 votes to win by a 11,923 vote majority compared with the 4,117 majority obtained by Datuk Yong Teck Lee when he won the seat for the BN in the 1999 general election.

DAP's Dr Hiew King Cheu secured 3,716 votes while Christina Liew Chin Jin of Parti Keadilan Nasional lost her deposit when she received 2,613 votes. There were 132 spoilt votes.

The result was announced by returning officer Alijus Sipil after 9pm at the Maksak Hall in Likas.

Election Commission secretary Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar described the turnout as among the lowest ever recorded in the country's by-election history.

"The voters could have moved to other areas. I believe that is the main reason," he said.

Gaya, which covers the Likas and Inanam State constituencies, has 49,427 registered voters, including 76 postal voters.

Despite the fine weather, voters, especially those in urban areas, shunned the 21 polling centres which closed at 5pm. With the DAP and Keadilan unable to reach a compromise over a single opposition candidate, it is believed that many had stayed away from the ballot boxes since the result was a foregone conclusion.

To coax more voters to the balloting centres, the BN provided transport, with cars and four-wheel drive vehicles decorated with party flags and stickers making several trips.

The by-election was called following the disqualification of Yong, who was found guilty by the Election Court of engaging in corrupt practices when he won the Likas seat in the 1999 State elections.

There are 19,122 Chinese voters (38.69 per cent), 16,630 non-Muslim-Bumiputera (33.65 per cent), 10,699 Muslim-Bumiputera (21.64 per cent), 2,582 others (5.22 per cent) and 394 Indian voters (0.8 per cent).

United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation secretary-general Datuk Wences Anggang said one of the reasons for the low turnout was because voters had been moved from their traditional polling centres to other centres.

Wan Ahmad said the election was conducted smoothly with party workers complying with instructions.

"Except for a shouting match among some vote canvassers at one polling centre, voting was incident-free," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his speech, thanked voters for giving a resounding victory to the BN.

He also thanked BN election workers for their hard work.

"I wish to take this opportunity to say that all the projects proposed by Datuk Yong Teck Lee will be continued by the new MP," he said.

In his victory speech, Liew thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah and BN component party leaders for their trust and confidence in picking him as the candidate.

Yong said he was happy with the convincing victory and said the result showed that the people of Sabah had rejected the Opposition.

"With the strong mandate given by the voters, I am sure Liew will attend to their problems and work hard," he said.

Parti Bersatu Sabah president Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said the result was an indication that the Kadazandusun people fully supported the Government.

"It also indicates that they have high hopes of the Government solving their problems."

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