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Focus on impending by-elections

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ELECTION fever hit the country following the announcement of the July 18 Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit State by-elections in Kedah.

The Bahasa Malaysia Press alternated between this and the equally exciting matter of whether Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Razak would ascend to the position of Deputy Prime Minister next year.

Berita Harian, highlighting the fact that a battle royale was looming on the political horizon, said constituents in both areas should ask themselves several searching questions.

One was whether Pas, under its late president Datuk Fadzil Noor, had been effective in developing both constituencies where he was MP and State Assemblyman.

They should also compare the development in the rest of the country with that of Pas-controlled Kelantan and Terengganu.

For the Barisan Nasional, the newspaper opined in its editorial, victory will not come easily.

Berita Harian felt that a lot of work needed to go into campaigning with its election machinery pushed to the limit for success.

Umno leaders in Kedah needed to work hard to ensure victories and reassure the people in the State that the BN was the only party that could guarantee development.

Last Monday, the newspaper quoted Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob as saying that the party had yet to decide on its candidates for the by-elections.

Berita Harian said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would analyse the situation on the ground and advise Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Utusan Malaysia, in its Bisik Bisik column, said early reports indicated that Fadzil's son may be a candidate for the by-elections.

This was probably because Pas did not have any issues to fight besides the fact that the party would gain by using sentimental factors against the Barisan Nasional.

Columnist Awang Selamat felt that Umno should go for the votes of fence-sitters to ensure victory as they would decide the out-come of the contests.

Utusan Malaysia on Friday quoted Umno information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayub as urging Pas not to politicise Fadzil's death to garner votes in the two elections.

According to the former Minister, he had heard rumours alleging that Fadzil had been poisoned by certain quarters and that the opposition party was using this in its campaigns.

Megat Junid urged Pas to stop this vicious rumour if it was indeed using it in the campaign for the seats.

On the Umno front, both Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia carried a story on Thursday quoting Najib as expressing surprise at Dr Mahathir's statement that the former may become Abdullah's deputy in future.

Saying that he was surprised by the open manner in which it was stated, the Defence Minister, the most senior Umno vice-president, added that who would assume the Deputy Prime Minister's post next year was up to the party leadership.

Asked if the statement was an acknowledgement of his future position,