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Ketari-Adnan

KETARI: A SECOND CHALLENGE FOR ADNAN

By: Mohd Shukri Ishak

KUANTAN, March 8 (Bernama) -- After having overcome the obstacle in the form of the Sanggang state constituency by-election in April 2000, Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob will face yet another challenge in a second by-election within a space of two years.

Adnan, 52, who was appointed Menteri Besar on May 25, 1999 is expected to stave off the opposition in another by-election in Pahang following the death of Ketari State Assemblyman Datuk Loke Koon Kam on March 3.

The people can be expected to be reminded of the "Sanggang Incident" by certain groups, referring to "a reaction by Adnan" to the provocation of a group of opposition supporters which resulted in the Menteri Besar being labelled as a "thug".

"That one reaction by Adnan" could have given a "significant effect" if the Barisan Nasional (BN) had lost in the Sanggang by-election.

Nevertheless, BN had succeeded in retaining the Sanggang state seat when its candidate Redzwan Harun defeated PAS candidate Datuk Hishamuddin Yahaya by a 1,963-vote majority.

A political analyst, who declined to be named, said Adnan is basically a good leader to head the BN election machinery, it is only that he has to be cautious at times lest his actions would be politicised by the opposition in the campaign during the impending by-election.

In fact Adnan himself, when speaking at a function in Kuantan recently (March 5), admitted that he is "happy" being labelled as a "thug".

"When I walk about in town, many people avoided me, probably (they're) scared that the Menteri Besar is passing by," he said in jest.

"But after I greeted them, they started to shake my hand and I wish to clarify that so far, the Pahang Menteri Besar has never slapped anyone (although he may have been labelled as a thug)," he said seriously.

Several leaders and political analysts are of the opinion that Adnan's leadership as chairman of the Pahang Barisan Nasional (BN) Liaison Body could ensure that the Ketari state seat would remain with the BN.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob had said on Monday that he was convinced that Adnan is capable of managing the election machinery for the Ketari by-election.

"I feel we should thank and give our appreciation to the MB who had taken the initiative by drawing up a strategy so that we will retain the support at several key centres through the branches," Khalil said.

Through the preparations by the State Umno Liaison Body, which is also chaired by Adnan, Khalil is confident that Umno would face no problem in coordinating all strategies at the BN level.

Several politicians in Pahang are also confident that under Adnan's leadership as Pahang BN chairman, the party would be able to defend the Ketari state seat after the success in the Sanggang by-election two years ago.

Dong State Assemblyman Datuk Shahiruddin Ab Moin, when contacted by Bernama, said he was confident that under the leadership of the Pahang Menteri Besar, BN would be able to retain Ketari.

Meanwhile, when asked to comment on the proposal by Parti Gerakan President Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik that Adnan be appointed chairman of the BN election machinery, the Menteri Besar said that he would carry out the task if he was appointed.

"I will accept the responsibility and carry out my duty if Prime

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants me to assume the post," he said yesterday after chairing the State Exco meeting in Bentong.

Adnan said the question as to who would assume the post was not important. "What is important is the cooperation given by all Barisan Nasional component parties in facing the by-election," he said.

Adnan is actually "noted" for his attitude and "stern" statements which were sometimes viewed as "harsh" by certain groups.

In fact, when asked by reporters on preparations by the BN machinery in facing the impending Ketari by-election at a function on Tuesday, Adnan cynically replied: "We are not like the opposition parties which are very active whenever there is an election, when there is an election the opposition are active in spreading slanders."

Adnan said if many people were too preoccupied with by-elections, they give the impression that they were "geared up" waiting and "hoping" for the death of their elected representatives.

"After this, we have to ensure that our elected representatives are truly healthy," he said.

Adnan said the state government machinery led by BN is certainly working hard to ensure that the wellbeing of the voters in the Ketari constituency are always looked after even when there is no election.

The contest for the Ketari state constituency seat between the candidate from the opposition which is expected to be from the DAP and the BN candidate from Gerakan is expected to be intense.

In the 1999 general election, the late Loke (BN) beat DAP candidate Choong Siew Onn with a majority of merely 231 votes.

According to the Election Commission's 1999 electoral roll, there are 16,434 registered voters in the constituency.

Voters in "10 districts" namely Genting Highlands, Bukit Tinggi, Janda Baik, Ketari, Ketari Tengah, Ketari Selatan, Sungai Dua, Perting, Felde Mempaga and Benus will cast their votes in the Ketari by-election.

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MS AO