

24/09/2002

Muhammad to meet Sabah BN leaders

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Barisan Nasional by-election co-ordinator Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib will meet Sabah BN leaders to discuss preparations for the impending Gaya by-election at the end of this week.

"The issue of candidacy is expected to be raised at the meeting and we will listen to all arguments.

"Nevertheless, BN interests will be top priority when the leadership decides on the candidate for the by-election," he added.

Muhammad, who is also Umno vice-president, said although there were indications that more than one component party may have an interest in the seat, the matter should be left to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also BN chairman, to decide.

Muhammad had earlier said that going by past by-elections and BN tradition, the Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) would likely be contesting the seat.

However, he did not rule out the possibility of BN fielding a candidate from other Sabah component parties should the need arise.

"It does not matter which party contests as at the end of the day, it is BN and not any other party which is defending the seat," he said.

SAPP president Datuk Yong Teck Lee was forced to vacate the Gaya seat following the Federal Court's decision rejecting his application for leave to appeal against the Court of Appeal's ruling upholding the Election Court's finding that he was guilty of committing corrupt practices during the 1999 State election.

The Election Commission declared the Gaya parliamentary seat vacant on Sept 18 and set the nomination date for a by-election nomination on Oct 3 and polling on Oct 12.

SAPP had made it clear that it wanted its candidate to contest the seat. Its supreme council had already identified the candidate.

In the 1999 general election, Yong obtained 15,315 votes to defeat Parti Bersatu Sabah candidate Johnny Goh who polled 11,198 votes.

Pas candidate Hamzah Abdullah lost his deposit when he only managed 749 votes. The BN is gearing for a four-cornered fight as the Opposition parties - Parti Keadilan Nasional, Pas and DAP - have expressed interest in contesting.