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By-elections (News Analysis)

PENDANG AND ANAK BUKIT MAY GO BN'S WAY TOMORROW

By: Jamaluddin Muhammad

ALOR SETAR, July 17 (Bernama) -- Barisan Nasional, which has been campaigning in opposition strongholds for the past eight days, is expected to make headway in tomorrow's by-elections for Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit state seats.

PAS is defending both seats while BN is trying to capture what used to be theirs before the 1999 general election.

PAS will surely go all out to defend the seats which were held by the late Datuk Fadzil Noor, PAS President and Opposition leaders both in Parliament and Kedah state assembly.

"BN has all the reasons to win the Anak Bukit seat now," said seasoned BN campaigner Datuk Abdullah Hasnan Kamaruddin from Kuala Kedah.

Mathematically, he said, BN has 8,000 members in Anak Bukit comprising Umno 6,500 members, MCA 2,300 members and MIC 200 members and this coupled with some votes from the estimated 5,000 fence sitters could easily pave the way for BN victory.

PAS, on the other hand, has 3,000 members only after shifting some 2,000 of their strong supporters to Kubang Rotan in anticipation for the next general election as a strategy to beat Kubang Rotan state assemblyman Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, who is the Kedah Menteri Besar, he said.

PAS neither confirmed nor denied the statement on the movement of its voters.

PAS candidate for Anak Bukit, Amiruddin Hamzah said in jest: "I don't know. If it is true, then it is good for Datuk Zakaria and bad for the Menteri Besar."

Abdullah Hasnan said if 80 per cent or about 15,000 turnout is recorded tomorrow, BN would surely win the seat.

"Whichever party gets more than 7,700 votes tomorrow will win the seat," he said.

There are 19,399 voters in the constituency comprising 16,889 Malays (87.06 per cent), 2,151 Chinese (11.09 per cent), 290 Indians (1.49 per cent) and 69 others (0.36 per cent).

The late Fadzil won the seat with a majority of 1,840 votes.

Local political scientist Assoc Prof Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak predicted that non-Malay votes would not likely go to PAS in both seats due to the PAS' extremist image.

He said overall, BN has more chances than PAS to grab the two seats as it is fielding experienced candidates.

"Theoretically, when the country's economy is good and there is political stability, the 'feel good' factor among the voters will push the votes for the government," he said.

PAS, he said, also has no solid issues to trumpet during their campaigns.

Dr Mohamed Mustafa said the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi could also carry some weight to the constituents.

"The credibility and charisma of Abdullah has helped BN to penetrate pondoks in PAS strongholds in Pendang due to his family ties with the Tok Gurus there," he said.

This would certainly sway some votes to BN as the Tok Gurus have strong followings.

Dr Mohamed Mustafa said some 5,000 fence sitters comprising mainly

first time voters would play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the Pendang result.

Pendang has 53,128 voters consisting of 46,630 Malays (87.77 per cent), 3,403 Chinese (6.40 per cent), 487 Indians (0.92 per cent) and 2,608 others (4.91 per cent).

He said that the final few hours today could also play an important role for BN and PAS in wooing voters and charting the results tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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