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Pendang-Election (News Focus)

TWO BIG MATCHES AFTER THE WORLD CUP

By: Jamaludin Mohammed

PENDANG, June 30 (Bernama) -- As the World Cup curtain goes down today, everyone is looking forward to witness two other big "matches" scheduled to take place on July 18.

The "matches" would signify Barisan Nasional versus PAS in the forthcoming Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit state constituency by-elections.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain who was the "captain" for BN when the team lost to Keadilan in the Lunas state seat by-election in November, 2000, said he was all ready and prepared to lead the team in the by-elections.

"During the Lunas by-election, I was not fully prepared to face the challenges as I wore the armband for just four months (after being appointed Menteri Besar) before the game," he told BERNAMA.

But now, after two and a half years, he is fully prepared to shoulder the task of ensuring BN victory in both matches.

"We are playing at different venues now. This is not Lunas. After all, the issues brought up during the Lunas game have been resolved," he said.

The issues include the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the "vision school" and failure of the government-owned Kerpan Tiger Prawn Project.

Syed Razak said both the Pendang and Anak Bukit areas had received basic amenities including water and electricity where there will be total coverage for the areas by year end.

"There are no core issues that can be exploited by the opposition in the two by-elections. Even Harakah (PAS official newspaper) has not highlighted a single issue," he said.

Will the forthcoming by-elections be an acid test for his leadership as the state "captain" after taking over the helm from Tan Sri Sanusi Junid?

"There is no such test. By-elections are normal events that take place whenever seats are vacant. We must win both games," he said.

Towards this end, the state BN had launched "Ops Ambik Balik", to retain both seats which were traditionally theirs and which they lost during the 1999 general election.

BN lost the two-thirds majority in the Kedah State Assembly after losing the Lunas seat leaving the coalition party with 23 seats, PAS with 11 seats and Keadilan with one seat, excluding the currently vacant Anak Bukit seat.

Syed Razak said the win was important not only for the two-thirds majority but also to ensure continuity of political, economic and social stability in the state.

He said the spirit and commitment displayed by Umno members during the recently concluded Umno annual general assembly especially in their requesting and persuading BN "team president" Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to stay could help towards victory for both the seats.

Syed Razak said the outcome of the two by-elections should not be used to gauge the strength of either BN or PAS in capturing Kedah in the next general election, as both by-elections were merely by-elections.

However, PAS thinks differently.

Kedah PAS "captain" Commissioner Haji Azizan Abdul Razak believed the outcome could, in one way or the other, reflect the opposition's ability to conquer the state in the next general election.

"We treat the by-elections like the national elections and we are

always ready," he said.

Both by-elections are being held following the death of PAS President Datuk Fadzil Noor on June 23.

Both teams - BN and PAS - will definitely meet, the latest by 2004, to decide the "champion" for Kedah before the next World Cup kick off in 2006.

-- BERNAMA

JM ANA