

15 MAR 2004

Abdullah-Withdrawal

PM: WITHDRAWAL OF CANDIDATES PROOF OF LACK OF ROLE OF OPPOSITION

IPOH, March 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi described as welcome news the withdrawal of candidates challenging the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the Labuk, Klias and Pantai Manis state constituencies in Sabah today.

Abdullah, who is BN chairman, was asked to comment on the victory of the BN candidates who won the three state seats unopposed at a media conference after attending a meet-the-people session at the Indera Mulia Stadium here.

Soon after, the BN won the Sugut state seat unopposed when another candidate also pulled out of the race today, within the three-day "cooling period", from nomination day last Saturday, which ends tomorrow. Polling in the 11th general election has been fixed for Sunday.

With today's uncontested victory, the BN has so far won seven parliamentary seats and eight state seats in the general election.

"Alhamdulillah, their withdrawal means that they realise that there is no longer any role for them as the opposition in the respective constituencies," Abdullah told the media conference.

"Looks like they are sincere just like in Kota Tinggi where (Foreign Minister) Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar won uncontested yesterday," he said.

The move by the PAS candidate to withdraw from the contest in the parliamentary constituency brought the total number of parliamentary seats won uncontested by the BN to 15.

On polling day, 204 parliamentary seats will be up for grabs.

Abdullah said that the BN's victory, even if the seats were won uncontested, was significant as it was not as a result of the disqualification of the respective candidates on technicality in filing their nomination papers.

"When the candidates willingly give way, pave the way for the BN, then that's still a genuine victory as the opposition are not prepared and felt there is unreasonable cause to contest," he said.

Present were Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali and

MCA

president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

Earlier, Abdullah, who is leading the BN in a general election for the first time since succeeding Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31 last year, reminded party members and supporters not to be over-confident following the coalition having won over 20 seats uncontested.

Instead, he said, they should work even harder to ensure a landslide victory in the general election.

He also hoped that the voters would come out in full force to discharge their responsibility and not regard the one vote they would cast as insignificant in the election process.

"We want as many as possible, if possible 100 per cent of those eligible to vote, to come out to cast their votes," said Abdullah who launched the BN manifesto themed "Towards a Malaysia of Excellence, Glory and Distinction" yesterday.

"Then, whatever mandate given by the people will be a true picture of the extent of support of the people," he said.

Asked would a low voter turnout be bad for the BN, he said: "I'm not talking about the bad or good for Barisan but it is not good for Malaysia."

He said that it would show as if the rakyat had neglected their responsibility and it would not be good if the government to be set up was one which won the election because of the small percentage of voter turnout.

Asked to comment on Lim Kit Siang's campaign strategy that a vote for him is a return of the voice of the people to parliament, Abdullah said that the BN also represents the voice of the people.

"We are also the voice of the people. When we become the wakil rakyat, the wakil rakyat is the voice of the people...that's the meaning of wakil rakyat and they will then carry the burden of meeting the aspirations of the rakyat," he said.

In the general election, Lim is being challenged by the BN's Thong Fah Chong, the incumbent in the Ipoh Timor parliamentary constituency.

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