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Secretaries-general give views on public rallies

Ramlan Said; M.K. Megan; Lim Chee Wei

POLITICAL stories dominated the pages in Berita Minggu and Mingguan Malaysia yesterday.

Besides extensive coverage of the Barisan Nasional's 50th anniversary celebrations at Stadium Merdeka, Berita Minggu carried an interview with BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat on the merits of allowing public rallies in the next general election.

For views from the other side of the fence, the paper interviewed Pas secretary-general Nasharuddin Mat Isa.

Mohamed said the BN had no objection to public rallies but was concerned about security issues.

He told the paper that all parties should not exploit the situation to create chaos, adding that such disturbances had occurred during several by-elections recently.

On which side would benefit more from public rallies, Mohamed said the BN could win comfortably with or without them as the Government had been serving the people continuously.

Nasharuddin did not try to hide his doubts on the prospect of the people being able to attend rallies.

"What's new? I have asked the EC (Election Commission) chairman himself about this. Although the commission says rallies are now allowed, we are still bound by the Police Act.

"Under the Act, many conditions have to be fulfilled although the EC may have given its green light."

The paper's columnist, Noor Azam, focused on the power-sharing formula of the BN.

Among others, he said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad shared the views of the country's first Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman who espoused the assimilation, and not integration, of Malaysia's multi-racial society.

Quoting Dr Mahathir, Noor Azam said the key to stability and peace was co-operation among the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

The columnist argued that the only choice for Malaysians was to live together as the identity of the various races would not change.

"There is no dominant race. The key is striking a balance. This country belongs to everyone."

Mingguan Malaysia's columnist Awang Selamat, commenting on the public rallies, said they were not necessary.

"It is pointless for the EC to allow rallies if it depends on the police to issue permits and pick the suitable location. What will happen if no permit is allowed for security reasons? What will happen if political parties are not happy with the sites picked by the police?"

Awang concluded that in such situations, the police would get the blame while the commission's image remained intact.

He said sometimes even door-to-door campaigning had turned into rallies.

He questioned the need to have rallies when the present campaigning system had worked well.

Mingguan Malaysia also carried an exclusive interview with newly-elected Pas president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang.

The Terengganu Menteri Besar and Marang MP spoke on a range of issues, including Pas-DAP ties, his party's strategies to capture several States in the next general election, efforts to win the support of the non-Malays

and his reasons for not agreeing with Syeikh Al-Azhar Dr Muhammad Sayed Tantawi, who declared that Malaysia was an Islamic country.