

BN confident of Chinese support in Machap
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Deputy premier Najib Abdul Razak expressed confidence that the country's minority ethnic Chinese population will support the national coalition in an upcoming by-election.

The by-election in the Machap constituency in Malacca will be held on April 12 following the death of its state assembly member, Poh Ah Tiam.

Najib, who is also the deputy chairman of the Barisan Nasional (BN) and the ruling Umno, said that past by-elections has proven that the Chinese backed the coalition.

"There are certain parties trying to portray that the BN no longer garners good support from Chinese voters. The fact is that they (Chinese voters) understand very well that their well-being lies with the BN," Najib said.

The Barisan Nasional coalition that has ruled Malaysia for almost half a century consists of the dominant Umno, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and other smaller parties.

In a recent by-election in the Batu Talam constituency in Pahang state, the BN candidate had trounced an independent with a majority win. The opposition camps had boycotted the vote.

In 2004, prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi led the coalition to a landslide victory, winning 198 out of 219 parliamentary seats during the general elections. The coalition has won all the by-elections held since then.

Good dry-run

However Najib has said that retaining "extraordinary achievement" in the general elections will not be easy, state Bernama news agency reported.

Parliamentary opposition leader Lim Kit Siang told AFP that the Machap by-election would be a "good dry-run" for both the opposition and the national front ahead of an expected early elections.

"It is a dry run of sorts but the important distinction is that it is a rural constituency so it is not that difficult for the BN as they have a considerable influence here," said the DAP leader Lim.

"It will be a sort of barometer to determine Chinese support," he added.

Machap is a predominantly Chinese constituency, accounting for 45.7 percent of the population, with a 39.5 percent Malay electorate.