

Chinese voters fully behind BN
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Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

The racially-charged speeches made at the last Umno annual general assembly will not cause the loss of Chinese votes for Barisan Nasional in the Machap by-election, said Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak today.

Najib, who is also the BN deputy chairperson, said the Chinese voters in Machap will continue to support BN candidate Lai Meng Chong, 56.

"We have explained to the Chinese community that what was said at the Umno AGM do not reflect the government policy," Najib told reporters after the nomination process today.

Chinese voters account to 45 percent of the 9,623 registered voters in the state constituency. There are 108 postal voters and 38 percent Malay voters, Indians 15 percent and others two percent.

Najib added that the rakyat were fully aware that all government policies were formulated based on full consultation and agreement of all BN component parties.

"All BN members agree and support the government policies," he said.

The 2006 Umno AGM gained notoriety for its racial-based controversial statements made by several delegates, including one who had asked when would the keris be used to protect the Malays.

Other delegates spoke the need to protect the Malay rights and for the need to continue to the New Economy Policy.

The perfect candidate

Najib also said that Lai was the perfect candidate to continue BN's stronghold in Machap.

"He was accepted by everyone in the BN as the candidate. We didn't have internal disputes over his candidacy," said Najib.

He added that BN had a greater advantage in the by-election due to Lai's local roots.

He said that while DAP was putting a candidate who had lost in the seat previously, BN's Lai was someone known well by the local community.

The April 12 state seat by-election will pit Lai against DAP's Liou Chen Kuang.

Najib added that BN's target at the by-election was to gain a higher majority than what was obtained in 2004.

In 2004 general election, BN's Poh Ah Tiam, 55, retained the seat by defeating Liou

with a 4,562-vote majority. The Machap seat fell vacant following the death Poh on March 15.

The local-born Lai, 56, is also the MCA Alor Gajah division vice-chairperson. He is the political secretary to Human Resources Minister and MCA vice-president Dr Fong Chan Onn.

"I will try my best to continue the development of Machap," Lai told reporters after filing his nomination.

"And I will go all out to get all the Chinese votes from the new villages here," he added.

DAP's tough fight

Meanwhile, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng admitted that his party faced a tough fight in the by-election.

"I hope the voters of Machap can break the political mould and tradition (of BN) because by hook or by crook, they (BN) always want to ensure their victory even with the use of money politics," he said.

He reminded the voters not to fall into the BN's election strategy of handing out 'election goodies' during the by-election.

"They will get benefits now but once the election is over, they will be forgotten," Lim argued.

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