

Sarawak polls looming, hints Najib
Malaysiakini.com
February 11, 2011

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today hinted at the Sarawak state elections are around the corner, saying that Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud is "inspired".

He said it is up to Taib to make the announcement, but noted that the chief minister has received a "certain inspiration".

"We have to wait for him to be inspired... He is inspired now, he's got a certain inspiration," he said after chairing the BN's first supreme council meeting of the year.

Najib (left) was responding to a question on whether the increased attention from him on Sarawak was indicative of the state polls date looming around the corner.

Najib, who is also BN chairperson, announced that Sarawak BN will hold its state convention "on a grand scale" this March 5.

This follows his two visits to Belaga and Sungai Asap in Sarawak last month, which he said can be considered part of his nationwide "turun padang" tour.

"I will continue (the tour) with specific visits. Apart from Malacca (for the Merlimau by-election), I am also scheduled to visit Sarawak again in mid-March," he said.

Taib, who has held on to the Sarawak chief ministership for the past three decades, has always kept the date of the state election a closely-guarded secret.

It is said that he would choose an auspicious date to hold the state polls, though it is anyone's guess as to when that would be.

The last state polls were held in May 2006, to coincide with his birthday. The term of the state assembly expires this July.

'We could have won by a bigger margin'

Najib meanwhile said that BN could have won by a bigger margin in the recent Tenang by-election if not for the flood situation that forced the evacuation of thousands of residents in northern Johor.

He said despite the low turnout for polling day last Jan 30, the BN is still satisfied with the results, which showed a 50 percent increase in their winning majority.

BN's Mohd Azahar Ibrahim won the contest, earning 6,699 votes and a 3,707-vote majority over PAS' candidate Normala Sudirman, who managed 2,992 votes.

The official voter turnout however stood at 66.7 percent, a 6.8 percent fall from 2008 and was largely due to a serious flood situation, considered the worst suffered in the area in six years.

Najib said had there been no floods, they were confident of securing a higher majority but

were nevertheless happy with the results.

"All three Felda areas gave us a 2,500-vote majority out of 3,700 voters. This means that even after the opposition used the issue of Felda being allegedly bankrupt, which is a big lie, the settlers and their second generation rejected them. Support from the non-Malays also continued to improve, and this is a positive sign.

"Despite the numerous attacks from the opposition, finally the rakyat have shown they are more confident with the BN," Najib said.

BN ready for Merlimau

On preparations for the Merlimau by-election, the premier said their election machinery has already been mobilised and deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin is scheduled to kick-start the official visits this Feb 14.

Najib himself is scheduled to visit Merlimau on Feb 19, while other visits by BN leaders will be spread out from then until polling day on March 6. He however did not give any hints on their candidate of choice, only saying that they will go for the "best candidate".

"What is important is that we get the best candidate for Merlimau, because the national issues used by the opposition have been rejected by the rakyat. If we can get a candidate who is accepted by the people, and has no personal problems, we are confident we can get good results," he said. Nomination for the Merlimau by-election, which was called following the death of incumbent Mohd Hidhir Abu Hassan last month, has been set for Feb 26.

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