

BN ups its game with 'Mah as minister' promise
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ANALYSIS TELUK INTAN Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's confirmation today that BN candidate Mah Siew Keong would be made a minister if he wins the Teluk Intan by-election is the clearest indication yet that BN now believes it has a chance of winning the hotly-contested seat.

Even though DAP won with a commanding 7,600-vote majority in the last general election, this by-election has been far from a stroll for the party, as a combination of several factors have left them genuinely worried as to whether they would be able to retain a seat the party has held since 2008.

Party leaders have expressed concern several times in the past few days, pointing out to a possible low voter turnout and also to BN's strong machinery as causes for concern.

As things stand, DAP is not expected to do better than its late MP Seah Leong Peng's performance at the general election last May.

This is because the party had at that time commanding support from both the Indian and Chinese community and it would be an achievement to maintain this support.

Some elderly Chinese voters might return to the BN fold due to sentiments over Mah's long track record in the constituency and the attraction in seeing the latter as a minister.

Indian voters have become BN's focus in the last leg of the campaign as both parties realise it is the Indian votes that could finally decide the fate of the polls.

DAP might see a slight increase in Malay votes due to its fielding of candidate Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud, but the rise could be minimal as most Malays are still expected to vote for BN due to their strong loyalty to Umno.

PAS, DAP's partner in Pakatan Rakyat, has stated publicly that it aims to help maintain DAP's 25 percent Malay support in the by-election and is not really focusing on making major inroads into Umno's stronghold even though DAP has fielded a Malay candidate here.

BN, meanwhile, have not made much headway in winning over DAP supporters, but a low voter turnout, especially fewer outstation voters, would drastically slash DAP's votes and leave BN just slightly behind DAP in terms of overall votes projection.

DAP: Let's not lose due to low turnout

According to analysts, including DAP's own strategist Ong Kian Ming, the party is not likely to record a commanding win in this by-election.

In the most optimistic scenario, Ong predicted a 1,000-vote majority for DAP.

"Everywhere I go in Teluk Intan, and in house-to-house campaigns, we are told that many voters are outstation," said DAP's Ipoh Barat MP M Kulasegaran, who was Teluk Intan MP from 1997-1999.

"If the Bukit Gelugor turnout is a barometer then we will lose (the by-election). Let's not lose because of low turnout," he urged.

"People should not think that DAP will definitely win because of the 7,000 majority in the last elections.

"BN is going all out this time," he said.

Even though the party's decision to field Dyana, only 27, as a candidate has created plenty of excitement and debate in the national political arena, Teluk Intan will remain an important and tight battle that will test the party's long-term strategy.

So far, however, Najib has not involved himself in the campaign.

But with his statement yesterday the party has just upped its campaign platform, with 24 hours to go before Teluk Intan folk go to polls.