

1M'sia to be put to the test in Batu Sapi by-election
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The 1Malaysia concept introduced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak will be put to the test for the first time in Sabah when the people of Batu Sapi cast their votes in the parliamentary seat by-election.

Already two opposition parties, Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) and PKR, have indicated their intention to take part in the upcoming by-election or more or less have decided on their candidates by now to challenge the ruling BN's candidate from Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

These parties are expected to announce their candidates this weekend.

Several names being speculated for this crucial by-election include political heavyweight former chief minister and SAPP president Yong Teck Lee, former Sungai Sibuga assemblyperson and PBS vice-president Thien Fui Yun for BN, and Batu Sapi PKR chief Hassnar Ebrahim.

Judging by the credentials of the potential candidates, none of them will be easy to beat although BN has the edge over the split opposition.

The Batu Sapi by-election will be held following the death of its MP and PBS treasurer Edmund Chong Ket Wah in a road accident in Kota Kinabalu on Oct 9.

SAPP, Pakatan may form 'strategic alliance'

The Election Commission has set Oct 26 for nomination of candidates and Nov 4 for polling. The constituency, in the state's east coast, has 25,582 voters, including 1,535 postal voters.

A lot of factors make the Batu Sapi by-election interesting after the political tsunami of the 2008 general election, which saw the ruling BN being denied two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Although on paper, this area is considered a BN stronghold, having won both state seats - Karamunting and Sekong - within the Batu Sapi parliamentary constituency in commanding style, the resurgent SAPP and Pakatan Rakyat, especially PKR, might upset the script through "strategic alliance".

"I think the majority of people in Sabah including in Batu Sapi accept or have been practising the 1Malaysia concept since time immemorial. We have a long history of unity in diversity, that's why our prime minister has described Sabah as a role model of 1Malaysia.

"In fact, the 1Malaysia concept is good for us as it prioritises national unity and economic development for all.

"I believe that under BN, the people of Batu Sapi have enjoyed tremendous development including basic infrastructure and other assistance like the subsidy for fishermen," said a local political analyst and retired journalist Othman Hamid to *Bernama*.

Sabah's politics is fluid

"However, the 1Malaysia principles need to be thoroughly explained to the people, especially at the grassroots level, to achieve the desired results.

"From my observation as a journalist for more than 30 years, Batu Sapi is no doubt a BN stronghold, particularly Sekong state seat which is represented by Umno in the state legislative assembly.

"But Sabah's politics is fluid in the sense that the tide of support may change from time to time as was evidenced in the state election in 1985 and 1994, especially in the Chinese-dominated areas.

"Whatmore if SAPP fields its president (Yong, *left*) as the candidate and PKR names a Muslim bumiputera for the Batu Sapi by-election," he said.

Othman opined that although the opposition - SAPP and PKR - were seen to be split, they could still forge a strategic alliance to spring a surprise.

"If the Muslim bumiputera votes are equally split, the Chinese votes will surely be the deciding factor, and if this happens, the ruling party may be in a tricky situation. So, I expect a tough fight in the Batu Sapi by-election."

BN the number one choice

However, Othman believed that BN was still the number one choice for the people of Batu Sapi because only the ruling party could bring the necessary development for them.

He said the Sabah government's coffers had also improved by leaps and bounds under the leadership of Chief Minister Musa Aman, and this could be a plus point for BN to retain the Batu Sapi seat.

The Batu Sapi by-election will not significantly tilt the power base in Parliament since the ruling coalition has already gained the majority. A win or loss, will therefore not affect the fortunes of BN much.

A win for BN nevertheless implies an endorsement for the government's 1Malaysia concept and better BN agenda by the people of Batu Sapi in Sabah, dubbed the 'fixed deposit' for BN.

On the other hand, a victory for the opposition will boost its confidence for the coming general election.

- Bernama.

