

'Taiko' Yong is SAPP's candidate in Batu Sapi
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The Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) will be fielding its president and former Sabah chief minister Yong Teck Lee for the Batu Sapi by-election.

SAPP vice-president Poon Kee Yong made the announcement this morning at the opening of SAPP's Karamunting division office in Bandar Leila, Sandakan.

"Sabah needs a brave leader. We need someone who can initiate efforts to bring back Sabah's autonomy and to fight for the state's rights. We need someone who can bring about change."

This will be Yong's first election outing after his disqualification from contesting the 2001 polls due to a 1999 election billboards offence.

The ban was lifted in 2006, but Yong stayed out of the 2008 general elections after SAPP's request for the Kota Kinabalu parliamentary seat held by PBS was turned down by the BN.

The Batu Sapi by-election will also be the first polls that SAPP is participating since the party quit the BN coalition on Sept 17, 2008.

Yong, 52, was chief minister from 1996 to 1998 under then two-year rotation system.

The Nov 4 contest for the parliamentary seat is expected to be a three-cornered fight among two opposition parties - SAPP and PKR - and PBS representing the ruling BN coalition.

Both PKR and BN are expected to announce their respective candidates tomorrow.

A gamble by Yong?

Speaking to reporters later, Yong said the by-election would be tough and that he foresees a fierce campaign because BN will "do all it can to win".

SAPP, however, would put up a strong fight, he said.

"It's not a simple decision. The BN will do carpet-bombing. They will also want to finish me off politically," he said, adding that the Batu Sapi by-election would have a nationwide implication.

If SAPP won the seat, he said, it would send a strong signal that the BN could no longer call Sabah a "fixed deposit".

He added that Batu Sapi resembled many constituencies in Sabah "as it has the rural areas, islands, water villages and urban population and many issues here are the same as in many other areas throughout the state."

Asked on the notion that he was taking a huge political gamble by going for the seat as it would mean the end for the party should he lose in his bid, Yong said the party had taken this into consideration before deciding to field him.

"The party is ready to face the challenges," he said, adding, "We dare to fight not because

we can win but we can win because we dare to fight."

Yong also said that the "Sabah for Sabahan" and "Borneonisation" issues would take centre stage in the party's theme for the by-election.

Opposition strategy

Last-minute talks between SAPP and PKR on Thursday failed to agree on a single opposition candidate to take on BN.

However, the three-way fight could be a opposition strategy to boost the chances of either one of its candidates emerging victorious.

While SAPP is running Yong, PKR could opt for a Muslim candidate to draw away voters who would normally back the BN candidate.

Nomination day for the by-election is next Tuesday.

The by-election is called following the death of incumbent Edmund Chong Ket Wah in a road accident just prior to the current parliamentary sitting.

Chong won the seat in the 2008 general election by a 3,708-majority, defeating independent candidate Chung Ong Wing. Chong polled 9,479 votes as against Chung's 5,771.

Batu Sapi has 25,582 voters, of whom 24,047 are ordinary voters and 1,535 postal voters, with 15,099 or 59.02 percent of the voters being Muslim bumiputeras, 689 non-Muslim bumiputeras (2.69 percent), 9,737 Chinese (38.06 percent) and others, 57 (0.22 percent).

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