

Government faces more bruising electoral tests

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The government today prepared for further political challenges, as two electorates became vacant shortly after its controversial power grab in Perak.

The Barisan Nasional coalition has been humiliated by the loss of two by-elections since a dismal performance in general election last March, and will be looking to prove it can claw back public support.

The by-elections are also a chance for the Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance to re-assert itself after the loss of Perak, which triggered calls for opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim to quit.

The new BN state cabinet was sworn into power in Perak today, despite the objections of the Pakatan which lost its narrow majority thanks to four defections.

nizar banned from enter office 100209 nizar 02Mohd Nizar Jamaluddin, the Pakatan Rakyat's chief minister in Perak who has dismissed an order from the state's sultan to quit, reported for duty at the government building today before being turned away by police.

"As far as we are concerned we are still the government. There is no document, no proof that we are not. We will continue doing our usual daily jobs," he told reporters at the official residence which he still occupies.

An uphill task for BN

Mohd Nizar said the opposition would take legal action to back its claim that it remains the legitimate government.

He said it was too soon to say whether he would contest one of the by-elections - for a national parliamentary seat in Perak, which was made vacant when an opposition MP died of a heart attack.

The other vacant seat is for the state assembly in Kedah where the opposition legislator quit citing threats to his family.

The votes will be seen as a referendum on the Barisan Nasional's popularity and its conduct in Perak, where the opposition mounted public protests against the installation of the new government.

"At this point, the raw public mood appears to be setting the Barisan Nasional an uphill task" in winning back the Perak seat, the New Straits Times said in an analysis today.

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