

BN may drop Subramaniam from Segamat, say sources
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 14 — Divisions within the local machinery could force the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) to drop MIC deputy president Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam from defending the Segamat federal seat, say coalition sources.

The Malaysian Insider understands the issue was among the top items raised at yesterday's closed-door meeting between BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Johor BN leaders held to discuss their preparations for Election 2013, which is due by June.

In the meeting, five parliamentary constituencies, including Segamat, were identified as potential swing seats due to the large numbers of Chinese voters in the respective areas. Since 2008, the majority of Malaysia's Chinese are seen as strong opposition supporters.

"The machinery in Segamat don't want Subramaniam **(picture)**. The number of Indian voters there is small so the local machinery is asking why put him there," said a coalition source who attended the BN meeting in Johor Baru yesterday.

In Election 2008, Chinese voters formed nearly half of Segamat's electorate, with Malays at 41 per cent and Indians at 11 per cent.

Subramaniam, a federal minister, had then beaten the DAP's Pang Hok Liong with a 2,991-vote majority, largely due to the Malay support, while a huge chunk of the Chinese votes, just as it did nationwide, went significantly towards the opposition.

"If Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is to field a Chinese candidate from DAP or PKR this time around there is a likelihood that we will lose Segamat," said the source.

Speculation is rife that PR is confident that it could wrest Segamat by riding on the strong anti-establishment sentiment among the Chinese voters if it fields PKR's Datuk Chua Jui Meng or even DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang, currently MP for Ipoh Timur.

The Star daily, however, reported on Sunday that Subramaniam was confident of retaining Segamat, saying he had a proven track record among his Chinese constituents who would continue to support him.

"I know my constituents, especially the Chinese, well. I have resolved the issues affecting the community and they have no reason not to support Barisan," the human resources minister said.

Subramaniam told the English-language tabloid on Tuesday that Najib had agreed to allot the same number of seats to the MIC as it had in 2008. He also said that two candidates from the March polls be replaced but refused to disclose to name them.

Another source present at the meeting said Najib only raised concerns on the five "hot seats" but did not discuss about Subramaniam's candidacy.

The four other "hot seats" are Kulai, Gelang Patah, Bakri and Kluang.

It is learnt that Johor BN leaders estimate the present Chinese support to be at 30 per cent, 10 per cent more than its initial "pessimistic" estimates, and, are aiming to increase it to 40 per cent once the state's BN chapter enters into the final lap of its polls campaign.

"With 40 per cent support, we can even win the seats we lost like Bakri and some of the state seats we lost to the DAP," said the BN source.

PR leaders have said they are confident of denting BN's Johor fortress with the help of Chinese support but admitted that capturing the state would be hard in light of the difficulties in securing the Malay vote.

Despite sweeping Penang, Perak, Kedah, Selangor and Kelantan in Election 2008, the loose coalition of PAS, PKR and the DAP won just one federal and six state seats out of 26 and 56 seats respectively in Johor.

The Malays make up close to 60 per cent of the three million-strong population of Johor, which is also home to a staggering 74 Felda settlements spread out across 21 state constituencies.

The Felda Malay vote is often played by BN as its trump card during electoral battles, and has also been credited as one of the key reasons behind the ruling pact's survival in the 2008 political tsunami, particularly in Johor.

But Johor PR leaders believe a slight 35 per cent vote swing among Johor's Malay electorate should suffice to topple BN in Johor in the next polls, provided PR goes all out to ensure that the non-Malays go anti-BN.

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