

# BN may go for Penanti

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BARISAN Nasional is expected to decide today whether to contest the Penanti State seat or to let it go.

The Umno political bureau, headed by party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, would go through all reports from various quarters before deciding.

The ruling coalition, however, is likely to contest despite the slim chance of winning. Pundits have in fact marked the result as a foregone conclusion.

Sources said BN needed to contest for two reasons — it was the ruling party and that it needed to disseminate the right information about government policies to the electorate.

A source said despite BN's new policies that were widely disseminated in all mainstream media, voters, especially constituencies under Pakatan Rakyat (PR), had yet to fully absorb them.

"So, the by-election is one way of getting the message across and to correct any misconception during campaigning," he said.

Najib had expressed an opinion that BN should not contest in Penanti as by-elections created by PR were a waste of public funds.



**LIM: Fully supports PKR's Penanti candidate**

But, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad felt that BN should contest regardless of the result.

He said BN should have stayed away from the first by-election — the Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat — as it was created by Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) to enable its de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to return to the Dewan Rakyat.

The Penanti State seat is one of the three under the Permatang Pauh parliamentary constituency, Anwar's bastion.

However, political developments in Penang may not give PKR an easy victory.

Already there are disagreements between the party and Pas, which wants to nominate its own candidate.

Anwar had brushed aside any talk of a major disagreement, saying the discord was a small matter that could be resolved.

"Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and DAP's Lim Kit Siang told PR leadership in a meeting that they not only agreed but fully supported PKR's choice of Dr Mansor Othman to contest in Penanti," he had told reporters on Saturday night.

However, despite the leadership of both parties assuring each other of support, the Permatang Pauh division maintained that it would freeze its election machinery.

This means, it would not campaign for PKR.

The Chinese voters, numbering 24 per cent of the total 15,000-odd voters there, are also another issue PKR has to deal with.

"It's true that they supported PR in last year general election. However, recent developments in PKR has displeased some of them.

"This was especially so when PKR announced that its candidate would be made Deputy Chief Minister 1 of Penang and would handle Malay issues.

"The Chinese voters are watching closely the political development in Penang as they want their interest to be taken into consideration," said one Pas division member in Permatang Pauh.

Given the scenario, Penanti can be any party's bag of gold, depending on how the parties woo the Chinese voters.