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Isa may go for Parliament

Kamarulzaman Salleh

THE possibility of Menteri Besar Tan Sri Isa Abdul Samad contesting a parliamentary seat that may lead to a Cabinet post is making the rounds these days.

Isa, who is also Linggi State Assemblyman, is however, keeping mum on the matter, preferring to hold his cards close to his chest.

He has repeatedly told reporters that his candidacy was up to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Isa, who turned 50 last Sunday, is the State's longest serving Menteri Besar. He was appointed in 1982, replacing Datuk Rais Yatim who was given a Federal Minister's post.

Sources said Mohamad Isa, who is also the Teluk Kemang Umno division chief, will contest the Tampin parliamentary seat currently held by Datuk Mohd Noh Rajab.

Several names have been bandied about as possible replacements for Mohamad Isa.

They include Serting State Assemblyman and Exco member Datuk Lilah Yassin, who is Jempol Umno division chief; Lenggeng State Assemblyman Datuk Ishak Ismail, who is Seremban Umno division chief; Kuala Pilah MP Datuk Abu Zahar Ujang, who is Kuala Pilah Umno division chief and Datuk Mohd Noh.

There is also speculation that Immigration Department director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat may be the dark horse in the race for the top State post.

If he is indeed being considered for the post, he is likely to contest the Johol State seat under the Kuala Pilah parliamentary constituency.

Aseh, however, has brushed aside such speculation as mere rumours, adding that he was not aware of the matter.

He said he was satisfied with his present position as a director-general. He has eight years to go before retirement.

Observers say that almost half the incumbents from Umno would be replaced. A few may swap constituencies.

Pilah State Assemblywoman Datuk Napsiah Omar, who was earlier the Kuala Pilah MP and a Cabinet minister, is expected to run for a parliamentary seat.

It is understood that Napsiah, the Wanita Umno deputy chief, is tipped for bigger things in the wake of reports that Wanita Umno chief and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman may be dropped from the party line-up.

Napsiah, when contacted a day after the dissolution on Nov 12, said she was not aware of such speculation but in any event preferred to leave the matter to the party leadership.

The MCA is also expected to make changes to its State line-up.

Rasah MP and Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Wong See Wah, who was earlier rumoured to be out of the running for a seat, may be fielded again following speculation that the DAP will field lawyer Christopher Fernando, whose Muslim name is Aris Rizal, in the Rasah parliamentary constituency.

DAP chairman Dr Chen Man Hin was reported to have approached Fernando, who is on the team of lawyers representing Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy trial, to represent the party in the constituency. Fernando is believed to be studying the offer.

The DAP is expected to use the viral encephalitis outbreak in Lukut in

its election campaign.

Lukut State Assemblyman and State MCA deputy chairman Datuk Dr Yeow Chai Thiam said the DAP was expected to go all out on the issue to discredit the BN.

"Well, they are certainly good at providing free lip service without contributing anything to help alleviate the sufferings of the people."

"Ask them how much they have spent to help the affected residents and farmers and their reply will be simple ... it's the responsibility of the Government," he added.

Isa described the Opposition pact as a "marriage of convenience", saying that "they will split if they lose".

He said the Opposition also did not have a proper manifesto as the components could not agree on a common political platform.

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