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Three top civil servants may be fielded in polls

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Three top civil servants are said to be in the list of Barisan Nasional candidates for this general election.

One of them is said to be none other than Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, who is tipped to contest the state seat of Tunjang, Kedah, although the solemn-faced civil servant brushed aside the suggestion when asked about it in Alor Star.

He said he had neither resigned nor would he be contesting the election.

Another potential candidate from the civil service is said to be Datuk Wira Mazlan Ahmad, national sports council director-general who may be fielded in a parliamentary seat in Malacca.

The third high-ranking civil servant is Immigration director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat, who is from Negri Sembilan.

Kedah politicians are convinced Halim Ali's name is in despite his denial. They said he had been making regular visits to the state since May this year.

Umno circles in Kedah had noticed and were even slightly puzzled by the top civil servant's presence at a number of functions and events in Kedah over the past months.

However, they had had little inkling that it might be the prelude to an electoral bid this general election. News of him as a possible candidate immediately led to speculation that he would be a potentiante for the Menteri Besar's post given the feelings of Kedah Umno towards Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

Besides, they said Abdul Halim was a highly qualified and experienced administrator and that he was handpicked by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is Kubang Pasu MP.

Most of his Kedah visits, an Umno assemblyman recalled, were centred around the parliamentary constituency of Kubang Pasu and done at a rate of about twice and sometimes even three times a month.

Once he surprised everyone when he officiated at a school speech day in Tunjang.

Kubang Pasu encompasses the state seats of Tunjang and Jitra which are currently held by Barishah Saad and Tan Sri Osman Aroff respectively.

Both seats were won with handsome majorities of 7,244 (Tunjang) and 8,438 (Jitra) in 1995.

Abdul Halim was born in Tunjang town, a small rural centre in Kedah situated along the road to Perlis and which according to other Kedah-borns, is famous for its mee rebus.

His career was spent in the Foreign Ministry before he became the first diplomatic service officer to be appointed Chief Secretary in September, 1996.

Abdul Halim will probably be the highest ranking civil servant to go into active politics although former Lord President Tun Salleh Abas had contested on a Semangat 46 ticket in Lembah Pantai in 1990.

A number of civil servants are also tipped to contest the polls and according to sources, a special unit has been formed in the Public Service Department to handle the swift processing of their retirement/resignation in the event of their candidature being confirmed.

Meanwhile, Aseh, speaking to Bernama, neither confirmed nor denied his candidature.

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