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Lunas by-election likely this month

ALOR STAR, Sun. - The Lunas by-election following the murder of its Assemblyman Dr Joe Fernandez may be held before the fasting month which begins later this month.

State Election Commission officer Abdul Hamid Ali said the date will only be fixed after an official notification of Fernandez's death by the State assembly Speaker.

"We have not received any official letter yet but it is possible the by-election would be held before the fasting month," Abdul Hamid added.

Muslims are expected to start fasting at the beginning of Ramadan around the 27th of this month.

Abdul Hamid said 26,181 people will be eligible to vote if the by-election is held this year.

He said this was according to the 1999 electoral roll which was certified on Jan 24.

The number eligible to vote in the by-election is an increase of 1,700 voters compared to the number who voted in the 1999 elections.

Meanwhile, State DAP chairman George John expressed shock and sadness over Dr Fernandez's untimely death.

On the party's preparation for a by-election, John said it was improper to discuss the matter so soon after Dr Fernandez's death.

He declined to comment further on the matter.

In the last general elections, Dr Fernandez defeated a DAP and two independent candidates by a majority of 4,700 votes.

Fernandez polled 9,760 votes while M. Kathiravelo (DAP) got 5,060 votes compared to independents Ibrahim Md Rashdi and N. Letchumanan who polled 2,158 and 87 votes respectively.

There were 24,481 registered voters in the last election of which 17,750 cast their votes.

Meanwhile, Bernama quoted Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain as saying that the BN candidate for the by-election will be decided within a week.

The State BN would convene a meeting this week to decide on the candidate and preparations for the by-election, said Syed Razak, who is also Kedah BN chairman.

"The candidate's name and preparations for the by-election will be forwarded to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for approval," he said after a meeting with penghulus from Kedah, here.

Asked whether the MIC would again be allotted the seat, Syed Razak said it would be decided at the meeting.

In Bukit Mertajam, Kedah MIC chairman Datuk V. Saravanan said that he would leave it to party president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu to decide on a suitable candidate.

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