

Six parties interested in Likas seat

By MUGUNTAN VANAR and RUBEN SARIO

KOTA KINABALU: Six parties are interested in contesting the July 21 Likas by-election as two national-based opposition parties meet today to strike a deal for a compromise candidate.

On the contest cards are ruling Barisan Nasional, Parti Bersatu Sabah, Keadilan Nasional, PAS and two fringe parties, Bersekutu and Setia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will decide on the Sabah Barisan candidate with three components parties including incumbent Datuk Yong Teck Lee's Sabah Progressive Party voicing interest in the seat.

The eligibility of Yong, who has held the seat since 1985, to re-contest is still in doubt as he was found to have committed an offence under the Election Offences Act in a petition brought by former Bersekutu

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president Datuk Harris Salleh.

Barisan is keen to see a new candidate to avoid "technical knockouts" on nomination day on July 12.

PBS secretary-general Radin Malleh said they would definitely be fielding a candidate as they had no plans to give "Barisan a free ride."

"Our choice will be named on or before nomination day," he said.

PBS circles widely expect Dr Chong En Leong to be re-fielded in Likas.

Chong polled 4,148 votes against Yong's 9,110 in the last election.

Harris, who polled 3,576 votes, has said that he will not contest and asked PBS not to contest if they were not happy with the electoral rolls.

Keadilan and PAS are also keen to field candidates for the Likas seat, which has a total of 26,196 voters with slightly over 50% being Muslim bumiputras.

Sabah PAS deputy commissioner Hamzah Abdullah said they would be meeting with Sabah Keadilan officials to thrash out a deal for a single opposition front candidate.

"A deal with PBS is out of the question. It's nothing personal but there is no assurance that their candidate will stay in PBS if they win Likas," he said.

Hamzah's name is among three being tossed as potential candidates for PAS. while Keadilan might be considering fielding their newly appointed Sabah chief Datin Saidatul Tun Said, elder sister of Umno supreme council member Datuk Salleh Tun Said.

Parti Setia has announced that they would field Zulkifli Lajah, who contested in the last round, while Parti Bersekutu president Datuk Monggoh Orow has indicated the party will contest if the rolls are clean.