

Straight fight likely for Perlis seat

DAP unlikely to field candidate for Indera Kayangan constituency

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By V. Gayathry

PETALING JAYA, Sat: With Parti Keadilan Nasional activating its elections machinery in Perlis, it all points to a straight fight with MCA in the Indera Kayangan by-election.

Party elections director Mohd Azmin Ali is in Perlis to meet the local leaders and get the feedback on the best candidate, as five have been shortlisted.

The party's political bureau is expected to make a decision next week. Topping the list is Ko Chu Liang who made an unsuccessful bid to unseat MCA state chief Datuk Khor Liang Tee, who died on Wednesday. Penang-based leader Cheah Kah Peng is also said to be in the running.

Sources also say the Perlis state liaison committee has recommended former secretary-general Annuar Tahir, who was

defeated in the party elections, as its choice.

Four MCA leaders have been identified to be proposed for the selection of the Barisan Nasional's candidate in the Indera Kayangan state by-election.

Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said four MCA leaders with integrity and capable of ensuring a victory have been identified.

Among those shortlisted is special assistant to Shahidan, Oui Ah Lan.

He said the list of names would be submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the BN chairman.

Speaking to reporters after meeting leaders of the Kangar, Padang Besar and Arau MCA divisions here last night, Shahidan said the selection of the four leaders went smoothly.

"It was left to the MCA to propose the names," he said.

Shahidan, who is the elections director of the constituency said the BN is confident of retaining the seat.

In the 1999 election, Khor defeated Ko by a majority of 1,974 votes.

DAP, although a Chinese-based party, is not likely to enter the fray as it does not have a strong presence in Perlis, said its secretary-general, Kerk Kim Hock.

"It is unlikely that the central executive committee (CEC) will decide to field a candidate. It has been a long time since we contested there. We don't have enough resources to organise a campaign," he said.

However, DAP publicity bureau assistant secretary N. Kajen Diran said DAP should put up a candidate to give voters a choice since both the BN and Opposition Front are competing on the Islamic state issue.

"The BN has declared the

country an Islamic state while Keadilan has been silent on PAS's ambitions to set up a theocratic state. This deafening silence amounts to tacit approval," he said in a statement.

He said DAP will be able to represent all non-Muslims and moderate Muslims opposed to the idea of an Islamic state.

Kerk said the odds are against the opposition in the by-election, given the psychological impact of the Sent 11 attacks on the United States.

He said while the MCA is facing a crisis in leadership, it doesn't make good ammunition for the opposition to attack the BN.

"The circumstances in this by-election are unlike those of the Lunas by-election. Then, the Chinese community had issues against the government, especially after the prime minister likened the Suqiu to communists."