

Voters in a spot over choice of candidates

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ALOR STAR: The by-election campaigns in Kedah are kicking off with both rival political camps claiming that their contenders are *calon-calon pengantin* (bridegroom candidates).

It is a local manner of speech meaning that the candidates are so suitable that the villagers would even accept them as sons-in-law.

Umno insists its candidates, Datuk Othman Abdul, 51, for Pendang and Datuk Zakaria Said, 58, for Anak Bukit, are ideal because they are well-liked by the ground, experienced and capable.

Both men are down-to-earth, the sort who would stop by at the *warung* to chat with all and sundry and whose homes resemble 7-Eleven outlets - open 24 hours a day to party members.

Zakaria is so sociable that when he meets people, he often shakes their hand with his right hand and throws the other around their shoulders.

"When he sees you from far away, he will sound his car horn, slow down and ask whether you have had something to eat. Then he will drag you off for a drink," said Abdul Manaf, deputy division head for Kuala Kedah Umno.

Othman, a Universiti Malaya alumnus, is also said to be well suited for Pendang because of his religious school background.

"Both candidates are real grassroots politicians. They never turn down requests for help," said Guntor Tobeng, Alor Star Umno Youth chief.

PAS, on its part, is touting Dr Mohd Hayati Othman, 45, and Amiruddin Hamzah, 40, as

young, dynamic professionals who will help chart the future of the party.

In fact, the party has even tried to draw parallels between Dr Mohd Hayati, a private medical practitioner and his doctor wife with another Kedah doctor husband-and-wife, namely, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The soft-spoken Dr Hayati is said to give free medical service to poor patients just as Dr Mahathir had done as a young doctor in Alor Star.

PAS' choice of Amiruddin, a British-trained engineer, may have to do with him coming from an Umno family. His father is, known as Cikgu Hamzah, used to be the information head of Kuala Kedah Umno and is still active in the party.