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Gaya by-election: BN likely to face independent, three Opposition

KOTA KINABALU, Sun. - Barisan Nasional is likely to face an independent and three Opposition candidates in the Oct 12 Gaya by-election.

Parti Keadilan Nasional is fielding its Sabah treasurer Christina Liew, while DAP has named its Kota Kinabalu branch chairman Hiew King Cheu as its candidate.

Sabah Pas has identified its state commissioner Datu Dr Bandira Alang as a candidate while accountant Joshua Kong is keen to contest if he can come up with a RM5,000 deposit by nomination day on Oct 3.

Kong stood as an independent in last year's Likas by-election and lost his deposit when he polled 50 votes.

BN has not announced its candidate yet.

Keadilan has asked DAP, its former partner in the Barisan Alternatif, not to contest.

DAP, however, is adamant about contesting as it had won the seat in the 1986 general election through Gerard Math.

Math polled 12,388 votes against BN's Joseph Chia, who received 4,180 votes in a straight fight.

DAP's Seputeh MP Teresa Kok said the party's track record in Gaya was reason enough for Keadilan to give way to it, instead of the other way round.

"We have done well in the past and we believe we can still do well this time," she said.

The Election Commission said yesterday that 21 nomination forms had been issued to political parties and individuals keen to contest the by-election.

For the BN, Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), Sabah Umno and Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) have indicated interest.

SAPP president Datuk Yong Teck Lee, who was disqualified as Gaya MP, has submitted the party's choice to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Yong said SAPP should be allowed to contest the seat as it was held by the party since the 1995 general election.

Abdullah, who met with State BN component leaders on Tuesday, said the BN candidate would be announced after Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was consulted.

The Gaya parliamentary by-election is being called after Yong was forced to vacate the seat when the Election Court found him guilty of corrupt practices in the 1999 State election for the Likas state seat.

There are 49,427 voters in the mixed constituency, including 76 postal voters.

In the 1999 general election, Yong polled 15,315 votes to win the seat in a three-cornered fight with PBS' Johnny Goh (11,198 votes) and Pas' Hamzah Abdullah, who polled 729 votes and lost his deposit.

Meanwhile, the Opposition front comprising Parti Keadilan Nasional, Pas and Parti Rakyat Malaysia, is still hopeful that a single opposition candidate will contest the by-election.

The Opposition coalition and its former partner DAP have not closed channels towards reaching a compromise as nomination day is three days away.

The question of a single opposition candidate will be deliberated at the front's presidential council meeting at Parliament House at 2.30pm

tomorrow.