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No clear indication on candidates for Pendang and Anak Bukit contests

Zubaidah Bakar

UMNO and Pas, likely to be the only parties contesting in the Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit State by-elections, have yet to select their candidates but several names have been making the rounds.

Among those highly tipped to contest in Anak Bukit under the BN banner is Datuk Zakaria Said, 58, a former State Executive Councillor who was Anak Bukit assemblyman from 1982 to 1995.

He contested and won the Kuala Kedah parliamentary constituency after defeating Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor in the 1995 general election but was dropped in the last general election.

Fadzil who was Pas president, died in Kuala Lumpur on June 23 after undergoing a coronary bypass.

Zakaria was Kuala Kedah Umno division chief until he decided to give way to Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain last year. He contested the deputy division chief's post but lost in the four-cornered fight and was subsequently appointed as the division committee member.

The other possible candidate said to have an equal chance with Zakaria is Kuala Kedah division secretary Hashim Jahaya.

Many believe Hashim, a lawyer in his early 40s and from Sematang Gunong in Anak Bukit will stand a better chance than Zakaria.

There are several names cited for Pendang but only two seem to be strong candidates - division chief Datuk Othman Abdul, whom Fadzil defeated in 1999 and division youth chief Najmuddin Darus.

Othman, who was former Mara chairman and Najmuddin, an engineer, are Kuala Lumpur-based but party insiders say this factor is not an issue at all.

Pas has shortlisted five or six names which will be forwarded to the party's central committee.

Consultant engineer Amiruddin Hamzah, who challenged Datuk Abu Bakar Taib for the Langkawi parliamentary constituency in the last general election under a Keadilan ticket is among those tipped to contest in Anak Bukit.

Kedah Pas Youth chief Aris Awang and religious teacher Ni'amat Yusof are two other possible candidates for the seat.

While Aris is a newcomer, Ni'amat contested the Tanjong Seri state constituency in 1999 but was defeated by State Executive Councillor Fadzil Hanafi.

Highly-tipped to contest in Pendang is Pas information chief Azizan Abdul Razak, who is also Kedah Pas commissioner and Sala assemblyman.

Dr Mohd Hatta Ramli, who was Fadzil's political secretary and recently made political secretary to Pas acting president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang and Fadzil's son Dr Ammar were mentioned.

However Ammar, a lecturer at the International Islamic University of Malaysia is said to be not too keen.

There is also pressure on the Pas leadership to field a woman candidate.

The by-elections - to be held simultaneously on July 18 - are being called as the two seats fell vacant following Fadzil's death. Nomination day is on July 10.

Between the two seats, speculation is rife in Anak Bukit, where a win to either side is a telling sign of their strength.

Umno badly needs to win in Anak Bukit to get back Barisan Nasional's two-thirds majority in the State Assembly it lost when Lunas fell to Parti

Keadilan Nasional in the November 2000 state by-election.

Pas wrested the two Umno traditional seats in the 1999 general election and aims to retain the seat to prove critics wrong that the party is losing ground, even in a constituency held by Fadzil.

Umno's shortlist of candidates will be submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when the latter returns from overseas and visits Kubang Pasu on July 5.

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