

13 MAR 2004

Nomination-Kedah

STRAIGHT FIGHTS IN ALMOST ALL SEATS IN KEDAH

ALOR STAR, March 13 (Bernama) -- All except two of the 36 state seats in Kedah are facing one-to-one fights between Barisan Nasional (BN) and PAS or Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan).

All 15 parliamentary seats are also locked in straight fights between BN and PAS or Keadilan.

The two state seats with three-cornered tussle are Bukit Selambau and Gurun.

In Bukit Selambau, State MIC chief and State Executive Councillor Datuk V. Saravanan, is challenged by Keadilan's Mustafa Khalid Hanafi and DAP's G. Ghanaguru. Saravanan is the incumbent.

In Gurun, State MCA chairman and State Executive Councillor Datuk Beh Heng Seong is facing Tan Choy of DAP and Keadilan's B. Kalai Vanan.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, who is defending his Kubang Rotan state seat for the third time, is up against Keadilan's vice-president Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, who moved from the Lunas state seat which he won in a by-election in 2000.

The main challenge comes from PAS which is fielding candidates in 27 state and 10 parliament seats while Keadilan in nine state and five parliament seats.

In the last election, PAS contested in 32 state and 10 parliamentary seats, winning 12 and eight, respectively.

However, it lost the Pendang parliamentary seat to BN in a by-election in 2002.

This is the first time Keadilan is contesting for state seats in a general election in Kedah, fielding nine contestants.

The party, however, denied the BN its two-thirds majority in the state assembly when it won the Lunas state seat in a by-election.

A tough fight is expected in the Baling parliamentary seat where two religious personalities -- BN's Datuk Dr Mashitah Ibrahim, 39, a newcomer, is being fielded to wrest the seat from incumbent Taib Azamudden Md

Taib,
54, a former chief imam of Masjid Negara.

Azamuddin won the seat in the last election with a 1,414-vote majority and is among the parliament seats PAS' influence is said to be still strong.

A keen tussle is also on the cards in Sik with Kedah PAS commissioner Azizan Abdul Razak defending the seat won by Datuk Shanon Ahmad in the last election.

The 60-year-old former PAS information chief is facing BN's Datuk Dr Wan Azmi Ariffin, who is Sik Umno division information chief and former state executive councillor.

Taib Azamuddin and Azizan are also contesting state seats. The former imam is vying for Bayu while Azizan is defending Sungai Limau previously known as Sala.

Besides Azizan, PAS is fielding its deputy youth head Idris Ahmad for the Jerlun parliamentary seat. The former Universiti Teknologi Mara lecturer is challenged by State Umno secretary Datuk Abdul Rahman Ariffin.

Idris, who hails from Perak, is making his debut in Kedah and is among the new faces fielded by PAS.

Two PAS bigwigs -- Mohamad Sabu and Mahfuz Omar -- are defending the Kuala Kedah and Pokok Sena parliamentary seats.

They are being challenged by Kuala Kedah Umno information chief Hashim Jahaya and Pokok Sena Umno division pro-tem chief Datuk Ahmad Lebai Sudin.

In efforts to wrest the Kuala Nerang state seat from PAS, the BN is fielding former deputy finance minister Datuk Dr Affifudin Omar.

The former Padang Terap MP has grassroots support to challenge incumbent Munir Zakaria.

A newcomer, the Prime Minister's Political Secretary, Datuk Mahdzir Khalid, is contesting in Pedu against PAS' Wan Jaafar Ahmad.

The two BN candidates are seen to have the strength to topple PAS in Padang Terap and help BN aspirant Datuk Ghazali Ibrahim wrest the seat which was previously held by Dr Affifudin.

In Merbok, former deputy information minister Datuk Zainudin Maidin is the BN candidate for the seat vacated by former Finance Minister Tun

Daim
Zainuddin.

The Media Adviser to the Information Ministry is facing Keadilan's Saiful Izhah Ramli, one of the lawyers of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir and Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung are defending their Kulim-Bandar Baharu and Alor Star parliamentary seats, respectively.

Education Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Mahadzir Mohd Khir and Agriculture Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Abu Bakar Taib are seeking re-election in their respective Sungai Petani and Langkawi parliamentary seats.

The Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat held by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad since 1974 is being defended by his political secretary Datuk Johari Baharum.

PAS secretary-general Nasharuddin Mat Isa is not defending the Jerai parliamentary seat which was previously known as Yan.

He has moved to the Besut parliamentary seat in Terengganu.

Jerai Umno pro-tem chief Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin, who is contesting in the seat, is facing PAS newcomer Che Din Arshad.

Badruddin lost to Nasharuddin in the 1999 general election with a slim 182-vote majority.

-- BERNAMA

ZS MAN TOM