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Masitah to face incumbent in battle of the scholars

ALOR STAR, Thurs. - A battle of Muslim scholars is set to take place for the Baling parliamentary seat between popular motivational speaker Datuk Dr Masitah Ibrahim for the BN, and Pas incumbent and former imam of Masjid Negara, Taib Azamuddin Mohd Taib.

Kedah Barisan Nasional is banking on the appeal of the fresh-faced newcomer against Taib Azamuddin, who will be defending his seat.

The 39-year-old Masitah's popularity was evident when her appearance to accept the appointment letter from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was greeted with loud applause from the huge crowd at the Menteri Besar's official residence in Seri Mentaloon today.

Dr Masitah is among the four women candidates fielded by Kedah BN for two parliamentary and three state seats.

Lim Bee Kau will be defending her Padang Serai parliamentary seat, while newcomers for the state seats are businesswoman Khalidah Adibah Ayob (Bukit Kayu Hitam) and Kedah Puteri Umno chief Suraya Yaacob (Sungai Tiang).

When met afterwards, the Alor Star-born Dr Masitah said she would be accompanied by her husband Abdul Shukor Abu Bakar, 39, throughout the campaign period.

"I have switched off my handphones and relayed all calls to my husband's phone to ensure that I can concentrate on the task," said Masitah, adding that her husband would be her campaign manager.

Despite this being her debut in electoral politics, she did not find it strange to contest in Baling and expressed confidence of her chances in taking on Taib Azamuddin.

Dr Masitah listed her clean image and her extensive background in Islam as her campaign weapon.

"My entry also shows that Muslim scholars are coming out to prove that they can be relevant in today's modern world. The new improved set of conditions for campaigning has also attracted me to come in.

"I am keen to do my part in helping to explain the real meaning of Islamic struggles to the rakyat."

She felt being a woman Muslim scholar contesting in politics should not be an issue.

"The most important thing is our willingness to serve the people."

Meanwhile, Taib Azamuddin said he was confident the people in Baling would still vote for him.

He admitted that Dr Masitah's nomination took him by surprise, but felt he could still defend his seat.

"It is her right to stand for election but I am very sure that I can secure a second term because I have worked for the rakyat for the past five years," he said.