

Election promises - Machap rolling in millions
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It was a sleepy hollow in Malacca but now Machap is sizzling hot as its famous roti kok. And the reason for this: a by-election.

Come tomorrow, its inhabitants will decide on whether to vote for Barisan Nasional/MCA candidate Lai Meng Chong or DAP's Liou Cheng Kuang. The contest was called following the death of MCA incumbent Poh Ah Tiam on March 15.

The battle for the hearts and minds of the 10,000-odd voters is clearly evident as Machap is now alive and buzzing, with its infrastructure being improved.

The journey from Alor Gajah to the town was mostly on faded grey roads but freshly tarred roads with new paint greet travelers as Machap closes in. New street lamps also line the winding roads.

On March 23, two days after the Election Commission announced the campaign date for Machap, the state government said it would build a recreational area near the Durian Tunggal Dam.

Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam said the recreational area would include a jogging track, fishing platforms, children's playground and a rest area.

The recreational area costs RM1.2 million and it is named 'Datuk Wira Poh Ah Tiam Recreational Park' after the late politician.

The park's first phase costs RM500,000 and it was completed in 12 days, in time to be opened by Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak yesterday.

Good news for Machap continued when Najib presented 102 grants for housing lots for second-generation settler families at Felda Tun Ghafar Machap.

On top of that, he said RM3.7 million will be allocated to Felda Machap with RM3 million for upgrading water pipes, RM600,000 for the construction of a multipurpose hall and RM100,000 to repair the mosque.

The deputy premier broke the good news to some 500 settlers at a carnival-like event called 'An Evening with Najib'.

Najib also said that the Melaka state government has approved the application for land by 50 second-generation Chinese settlers. Each of them will be given 7,000 square feet of land with a 99-year lease and a low premium of RM12,500.

Meanwhile, Melaka Chief Minister Mohamed Ali Rustam approved the 20-year-long demand of Machap Baru villagers to build 80 units of low- and medium-cost houses, which will be sold at price below RM60,000 each.

MCA president Ong Ka Ting, who is also the minister of housing and local government, announced that his ministry will give a special allocation of RM650,000 to upgrade roads

and drainage system and to build a new air-conditioned hall.

Health Minister Chua Soi Lek, who is MCA vice-president, announced that his ministry will spend RM160,000 to upgrade clinics in Machap.

Deputy Education Minister Hon Choon Kim, who is the party's organising secretary, announced that his ministry will give no less than RM50,000 to each of the three Chinese primary schools in the constituency.

Badminton stars

The locals were also elated when All-England and Swiss Open badminton doubles champions Koo Kien Keat and Tan Boon Heong dropped in for the 'Love Badminton Campaign' under the directive of the Youth and Sports Deputy Minister.

However, a DAP leader lambasted the MCA for exploiting national sportsmen for political gains.

As for the women, there were numerous activities as well. Puteri Umno organised a beauty care session, a futsal match, information technology lessons and a reading session.

Not to be outdone, Wanita MCA chief Dr Ng Yen Yen sang Mandarin and Hokkien songs to villagers from Machap Umboo New Village at a community hall.

Cooking classes and line dancing were also organised by the party in the predominantly Chinese areas of Machap Baru and Machap Umboo.

MCA also organised a karaoke competition where residents belted out evergreen Chinese songs.

The revelry will come to an end at the stroke of midnight, when the campaigning period ends. In the morning, Machap's 9,623 voters will decide on their town's future.

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