

PAS to apply feminine touch in Tenang?
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PAS may pick a woman to contest the Tenang by-election, in a rare move that appears to target the support of Chinese voters who make up 39 percent of voters in the rural state seat in Johor.

The shortlist boiled down to teacher Normala Sudirman (left) and lawyer Firdaus Masod.

It is understood that the PAS central committee had already decided on one of two during a meeting last night.

The decision will only be announced by party president Abdul Hadi Awang on Jan 16 during a rally in Tenang, which other Pakatan Rakyat top leaders will attend.

It is learnt that Normala, 38, the PAS Labis muslimat (women's wing) head, is popular among the Chinese voters.

"She has a very friendly character. Whenever there are activities like 'open house' during Chinese New Year or Hari Raya, she always attends. The Chinese residents here know her well," said a Tenang PKR Chinese leader when contacted.

Her selection will also help to fight the perception among the non-Muslims that PAS is a conservative Islamic party that discriminates against women.

The 5,635 Chinese voter in Tenang are seen as the key in reducing the majority for BN - if not topple its candidate - in the by-election.

Malay voters, the majority of whom reside in Felda settlements and Malay villages, are traditionally Umno supporters.

Although slightly more than half of the Chinese voters had supported PAS in the last general election, it is believed there is still room to shore up the Chinese support.

"About 50 percent of the voters in the constituency are women. We select the candidate based on winnability," responded Johor PAS deputy commissioner and by-election director Dzulkefly Ahmad when asked the advantages of fielding a woman candidate.

There is a possibility that Umno will also field a woman candidate, but he claimed this was never the party's consideration in shortlisting the candidate.

Speculation has intensified since Normala resigned her job recently. Under election law, civil servants are not allowed to contest.

The mother of three is from Ledang, Johor, and is married to a fellow-teacher in Tenang. She graduated from the Tuanku Bainun teacher training college, Penang and was a remedial teacher at the Sekolah Kebangsaan LKTP Kemelah, Segamat, prior to her resignation.

The other shortlisted candidate is Firdaus, the Segamat PAS Youth chief. The former student

of International Islamic University contested in last general polls in Buloh Kasap but lost to BN by majority of 4,466.

Teacher vs teacher?

The by-election is likely to see a teacher-versus-teacher battle as Umno defends its stronghold.

Rusdin Mahmud, a deputy headmaster of a national school of Chaah, a village next to Tenang, is the most popular choice of BN's three shortlisted candidates.

"He has always appeared at BN activities since the by-election was called," said a local reporter when contacted.

Rusdin's profession as a teacher will help him to earn the respect of Malay rural folks. He is currently the deputy chairperson of Labis Umno division.

The other two shortlisted individuals are Haslinda Salleh (right) and Hashim Daud.

Haslinda, 39, is a businesswoman who leads the Labis Wanita Umno. Hashim, a retired headmaster, is the Labis Umno division vice-chief.

Umno has yet to decide on its candidate. The name may be announced by Prime Minister and BN head Najib Abdul Razak during his visit to Tenang on Jan 18.

The by-election may turn into a three-corner fight as G Sivanandan, 50, a unionist with the National Union of Plantation Workers, has expressed his intention to contest as an Independent.

He wants to use the by-election as a platform to voice the problems of some 800 estate workers in the constituency.

However he is willing to retract his decision if the government can solve those problems, according to a Bernama report.

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