

PKR's Yusmadi may take independent route

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By Susan Loone

Incumbent Balik Pulau MP Yusmadi Yusoff may defend his seat as an independent since he has been dropped as a candidate by PKR.

Last week, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim named Muhd Bakhtiar Wan Chik as the party's candidate for the seat and made no mention of Yusmadi.

"I cannot say what ticket I will use, but I will consult the people of Balik Pulau before deciding whether to contest or not on April 19 (the eve of nomination day)," Yusmadi told a gathering of supporters last night.

He said that he was considering views from his constituents who want him to wait until Friday because they believe that the decision to replace him is not final.

"They have also asked me how they can approach the party's top leadership to express their views," Yusmadi, 38, a practising lawyer, said.

Among the 300 people who attended the gathering were PKR members, a group of men in Pekida T-shirts, Umno, Gerakan and Parti Rakyat Malaysia members as well as 74-year-old mother Fatimah Ahmad.

'Heart and soul'

During his one-hour speech, Yusmadi said he had given his "heart and soul" to the Balik Pulau constituents and urged them to tell Anwar to listen to the public.

Should his supporters ask him to contest as an independent, he said, he would to uphold the 'reformasi' spirit, defend the downtrodden and fight injustice.

"Independent or not, this is not my decision, it is theirs (his supporters) and I will respect it, whatever it is," he said.

Several participants at the event told Malaysiakini that PKR was fielding a candidate without consulting the local people.

They said that it was risky to do so because Yusmadi's majority was a mere 708 votes in 2008 and thus PKR was expected to have a tough fight ahead.

Plenty of options

Asked why he was dropped as a candidate, Yusmadi said Anwar had told him that he did not contribute enough to the party.

Asked whether he would join Umno, Yusmadi did not rule it out but said his mother would not allow him to do so.

"I am not worried about my image or that of Anwar's but my mother said if I wanted to do those things (which includes hopping to Umno), to 'please do it after I close my eyes'," he said.

Yusmadi said if he did not contest in the May 5 general election, he would focus on his other projects, such as a programme for 300 poor students, a human rights centre which aids about 600 families affected by development and his international engagements.

"There is unfinished work and this will keep me occupied in the coming days," he added.

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