

Machap: PKR gives way to DAP, with conditions
Malaysiakini.com
March 22, 2007

PKR has decided not to participate in the upcoming April 12 Machap by-election in Malacca, paving way for a possible straight fight between the DAP and ruling Barisan Nasional's MCA.

Party vice-president Azmin Ali, who also heads the party's central election committee, said the decision was reached last night after its political bureau meeting.

"The bureau's position was not to participate in the Machap by-election and urge the Election Commission (EC) to expedite reforms to overhaul the electoral system," said Azmin in a statement today.

In return for giving way to DAP, the party said it wants to contest the seat in the next general election.

It is unlikely that DAP would be able to win Machap - considered a MCA stronghold - in the by-election, and PKR is asking for the opportunity to try its luck when the general election is called in the coming months.

While stating that PKR would prefer to focus its attention and energy towards the upcoming general election, the statement makes no mention of any possibility that the party would assist the DAP campaign in Machap.

The Machap seat fell vacant following the death of Poh Ah Tiam, 55, last Thursday. He was also a state executive councillor and Malacca MCA chief.

Yesterday, the EC has announced that the by-election would be held on April 12 with nomination day on April 3.

While stopping short of suggesting a boycott of the by-election, Azmin said PKR would continue to press the EC to abolish postal votes for police and armed forces personnel, 'clean up' the electoral rolls and enforce the use of indelible ink on ballot papers.

He cited evidence brought before the election courts after the 2001 Likas by-election and the 2004 general election for the Gombak parliamentary seat as proof that the EC was involved in election irregularities.

Conditions attached

Azmin made it explicitly clear that PKR would like to contest in the Machap seat during the coming general election, which must be called before April, 2009.

"The Machap state seat is one of the areas focused on, which has been identified as 'very suitable' for PKR to contest in the forthcoming general election," added Azmin.

This was due to consideration given to the racial composition, organisation and influence of the party in the area, the performance of the party in the 1999 general election and the increasing acceptance of the party by non-Malay voters, said Azmin.

"PKR would demand for the Machap seat to be returned to us during seat negotiations between political parties in line with the abovementioned points," he said.

In 1999, PKR's Zamani Abbul Wahid polled 2,340 votes against Poh's 4,966 votes.

During the last general election in 2004, Poh manage to trounce DAP's Liou Chen Kuang by a thumping 4,562 majority.

PKR and the DAP had frequently tussled over seats in by-elections over the past years, but have thus far managed to avoid three-cornered fights.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/64874>