

BN vs DAP: Straight fight in Machap
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As expected the Machap by-election will see a straight fight between the ruling Barisan Nasional candidate and the same DAP candidate from the last general election.

Barisan Nasional's Lai Meng Chong (right) will take on DAP's Liou Chen Kuang (left) in the April 12 state seat contest.

These two candidates were the only ones to have filed their nominations today despite earlier reports that PAS may sponsor an independent candidate.

Lai was first to submit his name when he entered the nomination centre at the Machap Japerun Complex in Bukit Bulat at 9.15am, flanked by a large crowd of supporters.

Some 4,000 BN supporters and several senior party leaders were at hand to throw their weight behind their candidate.

Among those present included Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Malacca Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam, MCA president Ong Ka Ting, MIC president S Samy Vellu, Gerakan deputy president and Penang Chief Minister Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin, Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar Mohamad Hasan and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal.

Lai is the political secretary to Human Resources Minister and MCA vice-president Dr Fong Chan Onn. He is also the MCA Alor Gajah division vice-chairperson.

Liou meanwhile filed his nomination paper at 9.30am. He was accompanied by about 500 party loyalists and opposition supporters, led by DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang and secretary-general Lim Guan Eng.

Nomination period started at 9am and ended an hour later. There were no protests lodged in the following hour during the protest period.

Returning officer Hasim Ismail announced the straight fight at 11.15am.

Physical altercation

On a bright sunny morning, the large crowd which gathered outside the nomination centre jostled for place and chanted their support for their respective candidates.

Some were keen to catch a glimpse of the many national leaders who had convened to this place.

Police personnel and members of the Federal Reserve Unit were on hand to keep things under control while a police helicopter hovered above the Japerun complex.

However the verbal tussle between the two groups of supporters turned ugly when a physical scuffle broke out among some MIC and DAP supporters outside the nomination centre.

In the fistcuffs that followed, two DAP supporters were hurt. The opposition party had lodged a police report and one man has been detained for questioning.

Chinese-majority seat

The Machap seat fell vacant following the death of BN assemblyperson Poh Ah Tiam, 55, on March 15.

DAP candidate Liou, a businessman, lost to Poh in the Chinese-majority seat in the 2004 general election. The popular Poh retained the seat with a 4,562-vote majority.

BN's Lai, 56, is a local, born in Machap Baru.

The Machap state constituency has 9,623 registered voters including 108 postal voters. The Chinese account for 45 percent of the voters, Malays 38 percent, Indians 15 percent and others two percent.

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