

Candidates warned to stick to EC rules
Malaysiakini.com
April 3, 2007
Beh Lih Yi & Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

Candidates for the Machap by-election have been warned to strictly adhere to the Election Commission laws while campaigning.

Election Commission deputy chief Wan Ahmad Wan Omar reminded the political parties and the two candidates that campaigning for the by-election could only start at the end of the nomination period today.

He however added that the EC had no jurisdiction to take any action against the candidates or their supporters for putting up banners and posters earlier than today.

"That falls under the purview of the local authority and the police. They should take action," he said.

He was responding to questions from reporters over the complaints that BN supporters had put up posters and banners even before the nomination period today.

On complaints that ministers and government officials were seen arriving at the nomination centre today in official government vehicles, Wan Ahmad said "any objections can be raised in court".

He was referring to the election petition which allows a losing candidate to seek a review of the election result which the candidate thinks was tainted by corrupt practices.

He also added that the ministers came to Machap today in their official capacities as ministers.

Why on a Thursday?

Wan Ahmad also said that EC had no ulterior motive in fixing a weekday to hold the by-election. April 12 falls on a Thursday and there have been complaints that out-of-town voters would find it difficult to return to vote.

"Thursday was chosen because of many factors. The opposition will say it is not fair but BN supporters too will face the same problems.

"We have decided on this date and we have gazetted that date...this is a trivial matter," he said.

He also told reporters that the results of the by-election would be announced by 8.30pm on April 12.

"This is a small constituency with a small number of voters. We can announce the results early," he said.

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.

He said that the nomination process today proceeded smoothly without any problems. There were no objections lodged against the candidacy of both the candidates.

First time BN candidate

The April 12 state seat by-election will pit Barisan Nasional's Lai Meng Chong against DAP's Liou Chen Kuang.

Lai is a first-time candidate but has nevertheless served the people of Machap since 1972.

The local-born Lai, 56, is also the MCA Alor Gajah division vice-chairperson. He is the political secretary to Human Resources Minister and MCA vice-president Dr Fong Chan Onn.

"I will try my best to continue the development of Machap," Lai told reporters after filing his nomination.

"And I will go all out to get all the Chinese votes from the new villages here," he added.

For his opponent Liou, a 33-year-old businessman, this is his second attempt to win this traditional MCA seat.

In the 2004 general election he was defeated comfortably by BN's Poh Ah Tiam, 55, who had retained the seat with a 4,562-vote majority. The Machap seat fell vacant following the death Poh on March 15.

Liou said that he will be raising various national issues in the run-up to the polling day as many local issues affecting the Machap voters have been "quickly handled by BN" before the nomination day.

"Many of the voters' children are living in Kuala Lumpur. They can feel the pinch on the issues like petrol hike or toll hike," he told reporters.

He also expressed his confidence in doing well in the by-election.

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