

Parties at their last leg of campaigning
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Beh Lih Yi

Barisan Nasional and opposition party heavyweights were engaged in a marathon of political ceramah, rendition of Hakka songs and lei cha competition in their last attempt to woo voters before the election campaigning in Machap draws to a close at 12am tonight.

BN kicked off its final round of canvassing at about 8pm at the Machap Baru new village, the polling district with the highest number of voters, with a competition of lei cha - a famous traditional Hakka food.

Most of the local Chinese residents belong to the Hakka clan.

About 100 metres away, DAP began its own final push for votes almost simultaneously with a party supporter belting out two Hakka songs asking the voters in Machap to vote for the 'rocket' (DAP's party flag logo).

However, the presence of former deputy premier and Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) adviser Anwar Ibrahim at the DAP campaign attracted a bigger crowd of about 1,000. Only half that size turned up at the MCA's function.

BN leaders were also seen standing afar listening to Anwar's speech.

DAP is hao ren

The atmosphere at the DAP ceramah was already 'sizzling hot' after a short speech from PKR vice-president Azmin Ali that was punctuated with Mandarin phrases and warm responses from watching crowd.

"I am here today on the DAP stage because DAP is hao ren (good person), the party over there is xiao ren (a person of vile character). I can't sit together with those who are xiao ren," he said to a thunderous applause from the crowd.

As Anwar took over the stage at about 9.15pm and greeted the crowd with ni hao ma (how are you), the excitement among the opposition supporters - majority of whom are Chinese - rose to a pitch, resulting in a chorused response of hao! (good).

The opposition icon in his speech continued his recent attacks against Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak over his alleged involvement in several defence deal scams and the murder of a Mongolian national.

Asking the voters to vote for the DAP candidate Liou Chen Kuang, Anwar said: "When I was in the government, every time I saw (DAP supremo Lim) Kit Siang in Parliament, I got headache because he asked me lots of questions.

"I had no worries when I saw the Umno members because they always say 'yes' to whatever I say. So vote for Chen Kuang to increase the voice of the opposition in the state assembly," he said to another round of applause from the crowd.

Others who spoke at the ceramah included Lim and DAP secretary-general Guan Eng. Anwar and the DAP leaders held another ceramah in nearby Melaka Pindah later, where most of the voters are Malays.

Earlier in the day Anwar also met up with Machap voters in a series of high-tea sessions.

Anwar bashing session

Across the road, the BN leaders did not take Anwar's presence in Machap and his support for the DAP candidate passively. On their part, they spiced their speeches with criticisms of Anwar.

MCA Youth secretary Dr Wee Ka Siong lambasted Anwar's charm offensive against the Chinese voters by branding the former deputy prime minister as being 'anti-Chinese' during his tenure as the education minister.

"He can say one thing then and something else now. For him, front is okay, back is also okay," said Wee, who also told the voters in Hakka to give their votes to his party candidate Lai Meng Chong, 56, tomorrow.

Najib, who also spoke at the ceramah, asked the voters to be wise in casting their votes.

"When he (Anwar) was in government, he wanted to become a popular Malay leader, he never considered the feeling of the Chinese community," said the deputy premier at the ceramah.

Other BN leaders who spoke at the ceramah included MCA president Ong Ka Ting, MCA Youth chief Liow Tiong Lai and Wanita chief Dr Ng Yen Yen.

Both the candidates were also involved in house-to-house visits since this morning.

Polling for the Machap by-election starts at 8am tomorrow and ends at 5pm. The straight fight will see the bookies favourite Lai taking on Liou, who had previously lost in this seat at the 2004 general election.

While MCA is almost certain to win tomorrow's contest, all eyes are on whether the opposition is able to slash the ruling party's whopping majority of 4.562 it garnered three years.

Results are expected to be announced after 8pm.

The seat became vacant following the death of the incumbent Poh Ah Tiam on March 15.

There are some 9,000 eligible voters in the Machap state seat, out of which 45 percent are Chinese, 38 percent Malays and 15 percent Indians.

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