

Machap: A slightly higher voter turnout
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Polling centres for the Machap by-election in Malacca closed at 5pm with a total of 7,154 voters - or 74.35 per cent - of the 9,623 registered voters casting their votes.

In the 2004 general election, 74.33 per cent of the 9,889 registered voters in Machap turned out to cast their votes.

Election Commission (EC) secretary Kamaruzaman Mohamed Noor told reporters that the final voter turnout was very good, despite rain in several places in the afternoon.

Earlier in the day he had expressed his disappointed with the low voter turnout.

As at 11am, only about 23 percent of voters had participated in the by-election.

However the number grew steadily after that with the turnout hitting 45 percent at 12.45pm, 54.37 percent at 2pm and 59.2 percent at 3pm.

The by-election is a straight fight between Barisan Nasional's Lai Meng Chong, 56, and Liou Chen Kuang, 33, of the DAP.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak meanwhile said that he had asked the BN machinery to step up efforts to draw the voters.

"It looks like some of the voters will come out to cast their votes after tapping rubber in the morning and performing other chores," he told reporters at the BN stall in Tebong, near Machap.

Previously DAP had complained the fixing of a working day for the polling, fearing that the out-of-town voters - numbering about 25 percent - would not be able to come back to vote.

Earlier, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, when met outside the Machap Baru Chinese school polling station, expressed worry about the possible low turnout.

"We haven't seen the young people coming out to vote and the outstation voters mostly have the tendency to support the opposition. If this trend (low turnout) continues, it is a sign of concern for us," he told malaysiakini.

The DAP candidate, Liou, who is not eligible to vote in Machap, has been visiting polling stations since morning.

MCA not worried

BN candidate Lai however was not unduly worried over the low-voter turnout in the morning.

He reasoned that most of the local voters were rubber tappers who would not be able to cast their votes in the morning due to their work.

"We predict the voter turnout will hit 65 percent today but we hope it will be higher," he said when met at the Machap Baru MCA operation room.

Lai said that the BN election machinery will use get voters out of their houses to the polling booths in the afternoon.

Lai and his wife Loh Swee Moi arrived at the Machap Baru Chinese school polling station at about 8.40am this morning to cast votes.

MCA vice-president and Alor Gajah MP Dr Fong Chan Onn and his wife also arrived at the same polling station later to cast their votes.

Results at about 8.30pm

The seat fell vacant following the death of incumbent Poh Ah Tiam, 55, from the BN on March 15 due to kidney ailment.

In the 2004 general election, Poh beat the same DAP candidate with a majority of 4,562 votes.

Counting of votes will be carried out at the respective polling centres before the votes are tallied and the winner announced at the Kompleks Japerun Machap, here.

While MCA is almost certain to win the 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.

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