

BN says studying pros and cons of fielding Ghani against Kit Siang
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 — Barisan Nasional (BN) is “looking” into the possibility of fielding Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Ghani Othman in Gelang Patah to face DAP heavyweight Lim Kit Siang, the coalition’s deputy chairman Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said today.

Muhyiddin, who is also Umno deputy president, claimed that grassroots support for the idea was positive, saying that Lim did not anticipate this and that the DAP stalwart “is now trapped there”, suggesting that the veteran lawmaker would likely be defeated in the BN fortress.

“We are taking into consideration the views of all quarters because we need to study the details thoroughly as there are pros and cons,” Muhyiddin (picture) told reporters after handing out gifts to SPM top scorers here.

“We have received much feedback from the grassroots; this is something Kit Siang did not anticipate. We see that he is now trapped there,” he added.

The caretaker deputy prime minister, however, noted it was ultimately up to BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak to decide if the move would be in the coalition’s best interest.

“Ultimately the decision is up to the chairman of BN,” he said.

Party sources said Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek was asked to face Lim in Gelang Patah but the MCA president declined the offer, leaving BN to consider its choices for the hottest battle in Umno’s home state, say ruling coalition sources.

The Malaysian Insider understands the MCA is pushing for Ghani to fight the DAP adviser but an unsettled Malay ground and pro-opposition Chinese voters could scuttle those plans.

“Some in the BN war room thought it would be a titanic fight and that Dr Chua is strong enough to face Kit but the MCA president said no,” a BN source told The Malaysian Insider, referring to the veteran opposition leader by his moniker Kit.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) announced last month that Lim was to run in Gelang Patah, and spearhead the opposition pact’s push to pick up more federal seats in Johor. Dr Chua was then dared by the DAP to face Lim but the MCA president declined the challenge last week.

The MCA had earlier named local division leader Jason Teoh to run in the federal seat, won by Johor Wanita MCA chief and deputy national vice-chairman Tan Ah Eng in Election 2008 when she retained the seat by defeating PKR’s Zaliha Mustafa by 8,851 votes. Dr. Chua had said respecting the incumbent and his supporters was among the many reasons why he would not contest there, a view echoed by Muhyiddin today.

Lim’s political arch-foe, Malaysia’s longest-serving Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, described Lim’s move from Ipoh Timor “ridiculous”, calling BN members to bury the DAP adviser’s political career and said the local Chinese would not give support.

Lim then asked Dr Mahathir to run against him but was turned down. Since then, MCA-controlled newspaper The Star has been reporting that Ghani was popular with the electorate and would be ideal to face the veteran DAP leader.

However, it is learnt that BN has not included the caretaker Johor menteri besar in its candidate list due to a pushback from the local Malay community upset with rising costs and being elbowed out of the fast-developing and pricy Iskandar Malaysia economic corridor.

The 67-year-old Umno leader has been a four-term MB but it is understood that BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak wants to put in younger and "winnable" candidates to helm the Umno home state.

Muhyiddin said regardless of who BN's candidate is, the coalition would do its best to defend the federal seat.

"We will defend the seat regardless if it's Kit Siang or (DAP secretary-general and Lim's son) Lim Guan Eng who will be contesting there," he said.

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