

MCA confirms Kuantan seat on loan to Umno
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BY CLARA CHOOI

KUALA LUMPUR, April 11 – MCA confirmed today that the Kuantan seat will be on loan to Umno in Election 2013, as Barisan Nasional (BN) moves to capitalise on the spike in Malay voters in a constituency where tempers are still flaring over the controversial Lynas rare earth plant.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek announced the seat loan today, noting that the Kuantan seat is now seen as more “winnable” for Umno, as Malay voters now make up 63 per cent of its over 50,000 voters.

“Kuantan is on loan to Umno because Umno feels it can win the seat,” he told a press conference after chairing MCA’s central committee meeting at the party’s headquarters.

Kuantan, a parliamentary seat in the homestate of caretaker Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, will be closely watched this Election 2013, largely due to simmering frustrations felt by residents against the BN-approved multimillion Lynas project.

The seat’s incumbent is PKR vice-president Fuziah Salleh, who has been leading the charge in pressuring the government to close the plant down and is said to be popular among her constituents.

In Election 2008, Fuziah beat incumbent Datuk Fu Ah Kiow, an MCA heavyweight and former deputy minister, when she polled 18,398 votes against the latter’s 16,572, winning the seat with a 1,826-vote majority.

Umno is said likely to field Datuk Suffian Awang, a political secretary to BN chairman and caretaker prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, to face Fuziah in the coming contest.

Thousands have already rallied numerous times against the government but their efforts, both on the streets and in the courtroom, have yet to result in a shutdown of the rare earth plant that they believe will release dangerous levels of radioactive emissions.

During the countdown to January 1 this year, environmental group Himpunan Hijau amassed a crowd of thousands to demand for a regime change, urging its supporters to vote out the government that approved Lynas.

Apart from the Kuantan seat, Dr Chua also confirmed today that the Kota Laksamana state seat in Malacca will be on loan to the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) while a seat swap has been agreed with Gerakan in Pahang, with Gerakan contesting the Tanah Rata state seat and MCA taking on Ketari’s state seat.

He clarified that discussions on the possibility of loaning the Tronoh seat in Perak to MIC or the Wangsa Maju seat to Umno, have yet to be finalised.

The party president said for the Perak seat, the MIC was currently mulling between Tronoh or Jelapang.

Tronoh is currently held by DAP’s V. Sivakumar while Jelapang is held by Datuk Hee Yit

Foong, a BN-friendly independent whose defection in 2009 was among one of the factors that led to Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) fall from power in Perak.

In Wangsa Maju, currently held by PKR-turned-Independent incumbent Wee Choo Keong, Dr Chua acknowledged that MCA division members have sounded their anger at the possibility of losing the seat to Umno but said it was "as expected".

"I can understand their sense of frustration. They have worked very hard to see that MCA or BN wins," he said.

But Dr Chua expressed confidence that should the seat be given to Umno, which he said has as much chance as MCA in winning there, his party members would eventually relent and work to ensure BN wins.

Malaysia will decide its next government this May 5 in an electoral contest that is expected to be the most heated to date.

Some 13.3 million voters, including 5,200 abroad, are eligible to cast their ballots in Election 2013 to elect lawmakers in 222 federal and 505 state seats in 12 states. Sarawak already held its state elections in 2011.

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