

**In Penang, rumblings of discontent in Pakatan and BN**  
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GEORGE TOWN, April 19 — With just a day to go until nominations tomorrow, disgruntled political leaders and their supporters from both sides of the political divide have taken to the streets or held press conferences to voice out their displeasure over their respective parties' choice of candidates.

In what is touted to be a tightly-contested general election between the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) and Opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR), many political leaders who had expected to be part of this battle — but were eventually left out — are not taking rejection well.

This has resulted in some party leaders and members, both from BN and PR, going against the official picks and contesting as independents — creating three- and even four-way fights in some coveted seats.

Last night, former state assembly Deputy Speaker Tan Hock Leong and incumbent Machang Bubuk state assemblyman from PKR, announced that he will resign from the party and contest for the seat as a "PR-friendly independent".

Unhappy over being dropped from the PKR candidates list, Tan told a press conference last night that he had served the party since 2006 after leaving MCA and had serviced his constituents well in the past five years.

The 57-year-old, who suffered a stroke last year and appeared frail, said there was no justice in PKR if he was dropped just because he was "perceived to have ill health".

"I am still strong and able to serve my constituents so they should let me defend my seat," he said.

PKR handed out the certificates of appointment to its chosen candidates last night but the full list of candidates will not be revealed until later today.

Tan is not the only unhappy "rejected" candidate for this seat; on the opposite side, BN Machang Bubuk co-ordinator Ooi Suan Hoe has also decided to resign from Gerakan to contest as an independent.

BN is fielding lawyer Tan Lok Heah for that seat. This means there may be a four-cornered fight for the seat, set in the outskirts on mainland Penang, between Hock Leong, Ooi, BN and PKR.

On Tuesday, veteran Umno leader Datuk Seri Mohd Shariff Omar told a crowd of about 2,000 in Tasek Gelugor that he intends to contest no matter what happens, after finding out BN will not field him for the coveted parliamentary seat.

Incumbent Tasek Gelugor MP Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop has bowed out of the contest, leaving the seat — perceived to be a "safe" seat for BN — for a new leader to be fielded.

BN picked incumbent Permatang Berangan state assemblyman Shabudin Yahaya, who is also the Tasek Gelugor Umno division chief, to contest there.

"Tasek Gelugor is no longer a safe seat for BN so if they do not pick a winnable candidate they will lose it," Mohd Shariff had warned when he announced his decision to contest as a PR-friendly independent.

Pekala Machang Umno branch member Azmi Alang also voiced his intention to contest as an independent for Sungai Dua.

Fully supportive of Mohd Shariff for the Tasek Gelugor parliamentary seat, he said BN made bad choices in some of the seats.

The Penang Perkasa vice president said there were many who supported Mohd Shariff and that they also did not agree with the chosen candidate for Sungai Bakap in Nibong Tebal.

Over in Kepala Batas, former prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's constituency, some disgruntled members were unhappy over the choice of the Penaga and Bertam state seats candidates.

Some have been eyeing the Penaga seat ever since incumbent state assemblyman Datuk Azhar Ibrahim announced that he will not defend the seat this time around.

A group of about 30 tried to organise a protest against Sri Lahar Umno branch chief Mohd Zain Ahmad being picked to contest for the seat on Wednesday night.

The protest was called off after the group received warnings that they will be persecuted for such actions.

The group were also unhappy over the dropping of incumbent Bertam state assemblyman Zabariah Wahab, with Bertam Umno branch treasurer Shariful Azhar Othman given the nod to defend the seat for BN.

When asked about this last night at the launch of the Penang BN manifesto, Abdullah said the unhappy members are only a small percentage as compared to others who were supportive of the chosen candidates.

"They are just a small group, it is nothing," he said, showing the tip of his finger to illustrate how minuscule the problem was.

In Batu Kawan, BN co-ordinator A.Mohan resigned from BN component Gerakan, after Kuala Juru Gerakan branch chief N. Gobalakrishnan was fielded for that seat.

Mohan also planned to contest as an independent for the seat, possibly making it a four-corner fight for the Batu Kawan parliamentary seat between him, DAP, BN and Parti Cinta Malaysia (PCM).

Groups of supporters for incumbent Seberang Jaya state assemblyman Datuk Ariff Shah Omar Shah had also held protests to demand that the three-term state assemblyman defends his seat.

The 57-year-old, well-known as "Pek Moh" (white hair) among his constituents, is well-liked by the Chinese in his constituency due to his fluency in Mandarin and Hokkien.

Although he has not come out to protest over Permatang Pauh Umno deputy chief

Mohammad Nasir Abdullah being picked to defend the Seberang Jaya seat, the veteran was deeply upset and has refused to speak to the media so far.

Over the last few weeks, groups of supporters for PKR incumbents Jason Ong (Kebun Bunga), Yusmadi Yusoff (Balik Pulau MP) and Law Choo Kiang (Bukit Tambun) held demonstrations to demand that the PKR retain their representatives in their respective seats.

Though Law was not dropped from the list, it was rumoured that he may be shifted to contest in Bukit Tengah against Penang BN chief Teng Chang Yeow. The protest was for naught as it has since been confirmed that incumbent Bukit Tengah state assemblyman Ong Chin Wen will be defending his seat.

Yusmadi has said he is considering contesting as an independent for Balik Pulau but will not announce his final decision until later tonight.

While brushing aside the protests by disgruntled Umno members, Penang Umno chief Datuk Zainal Abidin Osman said this is a usual occurrence for every general elections as there are some who are bound to be unhappy over not being fielded.

"All this will die down by nominations day but I am sure; PKR and DAP it will be even worse when they announce their candidates," he said.

Both Penang DAP and PKR are expected to announce their confirmed candidates' list later today.

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