

Let MCA contest in Kajang, Dr M tells BN
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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31 — Barisan Nasional (BN) should give MCA another shot at contesting the Kajang state seat, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed said today, amid calls from within the coalition to cast a wider net for possible candidates beyond the Chinese-based party.

The former prime minister said that BN's second-largest party is seeing a resurgence in its political fortunes, so it should rightly be allowed to spearhead the coalition's challenge.

"MCA is making a comeback, so give it a chance. We should contest. We have never given a walkover to anybody," he said when approached at MCA's Chinese New Year celebration at Wisma MCA here.

On Wednesday, Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin said that BN should open up its selection of candidates for the Kajang state seat following the sudden resignation of PKR assemblyman Lee Chin Cheh on Monday.

Khairy said the coalition should consider a candidate who is qualified and stands the best chance in the contest, instead of sticking to the old formula that goes by the coalition's seat-sharing principle.

The call received support from Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who said that the BN leadership should change the selection method to take advantage of the population makeup in Kajang, which is around 47 per cent Malay.

When asked about the possibility of switching strategies to tackle the by-election, Dr Mahathir said today that it is best left to the coalition's top leadership to decide their next course of action.

He, however, tacitly agreed with the suggestions by Khairy and Ahmad Zahid for BN to consider selecting a candidate based on the racial makeup of the state seat.

"I don't know if it should be Umno, it's up to them. But if there are more Chinese, then it's better to put an MCA candidate," he said.

The Kajang fiasco cropped up on Monday after Lee abruptly tendered his resignation from the state legislative assembly, claiming that the move was for the benefit of his party.

Lee's decision to quit came hot on the heels of media speculation that a state by-election was in the offing to make way for PKR de-facto chief Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to

become a member of the state assembly and qualify to replace Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim.

Anwar has since announced his candidacy for the state seat, though PKR leaders have denied that it has anything to do with the alleged plan to replace Khalid.

The move has sparked increasing unhappiness within the Pakatan Rakyat (PR), especially within coalition partners PAS whose leaders at both national and state level threatening to withhold support unless PKR can convince them on the merits behind Lee's resignation.

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