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A meticulous process indeed in the selection of Barisan candidates

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THE closely-guarded secret concerning the "who and where" of the general election is likely to be known today.

For the Barisan Nasional, it is understood that the final list, together with the letters authorising the candidates to contest under the coalition's banner, will be handed over to Menteri Besar, Chief Ministers, Umno State liaison chiefs and component party leaders.

They will be responsible for informing the candidates and making the necessary announcements.

The opposition Alternative Front has also completed its list. One of its members, Parti Keadilan Nasional, held its supreme council meeting at Menara Marinara yesterday for a "final" look at its candidates.

A Menteri Besar said he was waiting for the call from the Prime Minister's Department for him "to come and collect" the list of candidates for his State.

For three straight days, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and senior party officials were huddled in the Prime Minister's Department working on the list of candidates.

A source said yesterday's meeting centred on the candidacy of several Menteri Besar who are expected to contest parliamentary seats or be dropped.

They are Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin, Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, Terengganu Menteri Besar Wan Mokhtar Ahmad and Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Samad.

Assisting the Prime Minister were members of the party's political bureau comprising vice-presidents Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin and secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob.

Another source said the process of finalising the list was being done more "thoroughly" this time. Even the background of candidates were scrutinised and additional information sought.

The selection process was so meticulous that those involved had to keep up a frenetic pace the past few days - shuttling back and forth from Putrajaya to official engagements already scheduled earlier.

In between discussions yesterday, Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, rushed to Cheras to attend a general election briefing for State police chiefs.

Najib, who was scheduled to attend a BN Pekan meeting this afternoon, cancelled his trip. On Tuesday morning, he took only 30 minutes to announce the 1999 Primary School Assessment Test results in Shah Alam before hurrying off to Putrajaya.

Although the lists of candidates have been submitted to Dr Mahathir since Monday by State Umno liaison chiefs and component party leaders, the last-minute lobbying continues.

A steady stream of politicians are said to have converged at the official residence of Abdullah in Jalan Bellamy in the last two nights, hoping for a chance to meet the Deputy Prime Minister.

Not only aspiring candidates were seen there but also the incumbents, showing that no one was quite sure this time around on whether they would be picked to contest.

Dr Mahathir yesterday also met key BN party leaders to discuss the coalition's manifesto.

Among the BN leaders who attended the meeting at Putrajaya were MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and PBDS president Datuk Leo Moggie.

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