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BN confident of victory with winning blend of candidates

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IN the general elections five years ago, a good number of corporate figures and businessmen managed to get their names into the nomination lists of political parties, particularly the Barisan Nasional (BN), to contest in the polls.

At the time, the country's economy was vibrant and the presence of these businessmen into the world of politics were more or less expected.

Furthermore, the increasing involvement of corporate people in party politics, especially in Umno, has been evident for some time, largely a by-product of increasing prosperity in Malaysia.

Malaysia's economy was at its best during that election. Being a businessmen, these corporate figures were an advantage as they had no difficulties in explaining to their constituents on how the political party had succeeded in developing the country.

The economy was a strong factor behind the rakyat's support then for the ruling party BN. It is still an important factor as the political party has succeeded in pulling the country's out of recession this year. As such, the nomination lists for 10th general elections, scheduled for this November 29th, are still filled up with names of candidates who are successful in the world of business.

Nevertheless, several names of businessmen were dropped to be replaced with more suitable corporate figures or popular academicians, as a tough fight is expected to emerge in the coming general elections.

For an example, economist Datuk Dr Kamal Salih, who won the Parliamentary seat for Wangsa Maju in 1995, has been replaced in the coming general elections with Datuk Zulhasnan Mohd Rafiq a well-known figure in the corporate sector.

Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said the party will be fielding popular and capable candidates for the 10th general elections.

When the BN nomination lists were finally unveiled, it revealed that the movement had come out with a line-up of new faces and experienced candidates to ensure a two-third majority win.

Fresh faces make up about a third of the 587 candidates who will be signing up to contest for the 14-party coalition. The BN is contesting all the 193 parliamentary seats and 394 state seats.

The newcomers' background ranges from professionals and administrators to businessmen and those with religious knowledge - a winning blend that BN is confident that will bring victory to the party. Among them are Universiti Malaya history lecturer Prof Madya Dr Mahadzir Mohamed Khir, former Utusan Melayu journalist Rosnah Majid and Insaniah Institute head Prof Datuk Dr Othman Ishak.

In capitalising from a candidate's popularity, BN has decided to field its candidates on their respective homeground.

Former Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh will contest the Kangar Parliamentary seat in the general election, a seat which he once held.

Former Information Minister Datuk Rais Yatim will also be contesting for his home turf of Jelebu Parliamentary seat. He held the seat when he was with Umno but failed to defend it when he contested as a Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46) candidate in the last two general elections. S46 has since been dissolved and its members absorbed into Umno.

Another BN candidate who will be contesting at his traditional constituency is former Deputy Works Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin, who will have a go at the Bagan Serai Parliamentary seat in the election next week. Zainal Abidin who was previously with S46 failed to defend the Bagan Serai seat when he stood as the S46 candidate.

Former parliamentary secretary of the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry Datuk Abdul Rahman Suliman, dropped in the 1995 general elections, is back to contest his once Parit Buntar parliamentary seat.

Fielding new faces is apparent in the Oppositions' nomination lists. This goes without saying for the newly-formed Parti Keadilan Nasional. The 10th general elections nomination lists also showed that the Opposition is united in preventing the BN from achieving its objective of getting a two-third majority.

Under the banner of Barisan Alternative, the Oppositions are Keadilan, the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Malaysian People's Party.

For the first time, the Opposition closed ranks behind common candidates to ensure mostly straight contests against candidates from BN. In the 152 of 193 parliamentary constituencies, it will be one-on-one contests between the Barisan and the Opposition.

BN is confident that the blend of businessmen, academicians, economists and professionals in its line-up for the polls is potent enough to get the job done.

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