

20 NOV 1999

Nomination-Afternoon

GENERAL ELECTION MOSTLY A STRAIGHT FIGHT AFFAIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 (Bernama) -- The Nov 29 general election is shaping up to be mostly a straight fight affair between the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) and the four-party opposition front after nominations were closed today.

The trend was obvious as the outcome of nominations poured in from the various nomination centres nationwide.

This would most probably mean fewer candidates this time around compared with some past elections where three and even more candidates were commonplace.

The final tally of candidates, however, was only expected to be known by this evening.

Reports from the various centres showed that nominations were conducted virtually incident-free and with the usual Malaysian-style air of festivity as candidates went to the nomination centres accompanied by a crowd of supporters carrying party banners and flags.

As at 2.15pm, the BN, in power since the country gained independence in 1957, won two seats uncontested -- the Betong parliamentary seat in Sarawak and the Tangkak state seat in Johor.

In the 1995 general election, the BN won a morale-boosting 11 parliamentary seats uncontested on nomination day, nine of which were in Sarawak alone and the other two in Perak and Selangor.

A total of 1,279 candidates contested the last polls for the 192 parliamentary and 394 state constituencies. There has been an additional parliamentary seat since then.

Of this, 427 candidates went for parliamentary seats and 852 for state seats.

The 1990 election saw 1,167 candidates, 410 for parliamentary and 757 for state seats.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is into his fifth general election as prime minister and equally veteran Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, are among top BN leaders involved in straight fights.

Dr Mahathir, who is defending his Kubang Pasu stronghold in Kedah, is challenged by Subky Abdul Latif of PAS, the party's Central Committee member and columnist of party newspaper "Harakah" who failed in two previous contests in different constituencies.

Dr Mahathir, who called the election some seven months before the five-year term of parliament ended, has expressed strong confidence the BN would retain its two-thirds majority in parliament in the polls with the country now in a much better shape, thanks to a strong economic recovery.

The BN is also making a determined bid to capture Kelantan, the only state which the 14-party coalition failed to win in the 1995 election.

Opposition parties PAS, DAP, Parti Keadilan Nasional and Parti Rakyat Malaysia appeared to have lived up to its promise of putting up a united front, calling itself Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front), thus leading up to the straight fight situation between it and the BN in most constituencies.

In the previous elections, it was common for the opposition parties to contest against each other.

A possible Nomination Day drama, the speculated candidacy of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, fizzled out when the former deputy prime minister and former

Umno deputy president decided to stay out of the race.

According to his lawyer, Zainur Zakaria, Anwar, who is serving a six-year jail sentence for corruption, did not contest because he believed he would be disqualified anyway.

"Anwar feels that it is not worth contesting the election because he will be disqualified even if he wins," Zainur told reporters.

Under the Federal Constitution, a person is disqualified as a Member of Parliament or state legislature if convicted of an offence by the court and sentenced to imprisonment of not less than one year or to a fine of not less than RM2,000.

Instead, Zainur himself filed his nomination for the Lembah Pantai constituency representing Keadilan headed by Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail.

The constituency in the city was the scene of many street demonstrations held by Anwar's supporters in the past year in protest against his sacking from the Cabinet on allegations of sexual misconduct.

He is currently on trial for sodomy.

Meanwhile, the Permatang Pauh parliamengary seat in Pulau Pinang, once the stronghold of Anwar, will see another straight fight between Wan Azizah and Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad of the BN.

Ibrahim, the Deputy Transport Minister, was reported in the press as saying that it would be a tough fight for him to win the seat if Anwar, whom he described as his "sifu" (master) at one time, was the candidate.

-- BERNAMA

AU RM