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Major battle in four states (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Four States - Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah - will provide the main battlegrounds in the general election, with Pas eyeing them as important targets and the Barisan Nasional set on counter-strategies.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the ruling coalition would concentrate more in these States when campaigning for the Nov 29 polls.

He said this was to counter lies and slander which had been spread by the Opposition, particularly among the rural Malay folk, who were easily influenced by those they consider ulama.

The intense battle looms amid news that the opposition front, which had been huddled in secret meetings the past two days, had finalised its seat allocations for parliamentary constituencies in the peninsula.

The formula seems to favour one-year-old Parti Keadilan Nasional which is getting 41 of the 144 seats the front will contest - one more than the more established DAP. The remainder will go to Pas (58) and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (five). (Full report on Page 2)

The Prime Minister, who this morning met some 10,000 BN Youth and Wanita grassroots leaders, joined them in declaring a pledge to do their best for the election. He led the crowd in the pledge titled Waticah Perjuangan.

Speaking to newsmen later, Dr Mahathir said the Malays, especially those who lived in the kampung, were vulnerable and could be easily manipulated as they had so much faith in those who called themselves ulama.

"There was one so-called ulama who said God used profanities... but because these are uttered by the ulama, they (villagers) believe.

"On the other hand, I have many times said that in Islam, slandering was worse than murder and that this is contained in the Quran. But the villagers chose not to understand because it was said by me, and not by an ulama," he said.

On Thursday, Pas deputy president Abdul Hadi Awang said the formation of a full-fledged Islamic State would begin in the four States when the majority of non-Muslims understood the concept of an Islamic Government.

Asked about media speculation that several Menteri Besar would be dropped and three very senior civil servants would be nominated by the BN Dr Mahathir said: "Each time there is an election, there is plenty of speculation. I cannot say anything yet because that is mere speculation. Let's wait for nomination day."

Speculation is rife that Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali will contest a seat in Kedah and be appointed Menteri Besar. Others named as possible candidates are Immigration Department director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat and National Sports Council director-general Datuk Wira Mazlan Ahmad.

Dr Mahathir said the candidates list was ready but it would be finalised after he had heard the views of heads of the Umno liaison committees and component parties. The final list will be issued just before nomination day.

Asked by a foreign reporter on what he saw as the greatest challenge in the election, a smiling Dr Mahathir said: "Winning the election."

Asked if the results could be affected if the Election Commission had verified the registration of about 650,000 new voters, he said it was wrong to assume that most of them would vote against the BN.

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