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Parliament-Dissolved

PARLIAMENT TO BE DISSOLVED TOMORROW FOR GENERAL ELECTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- Parliament will be dissolved tomorrow for Malaysia's 10th general election, Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail announced today.

Zahir made the surprise announcement at the start of parliament sitting after the lunch-break at 2.30 pm.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had earlier been scheduled to hold a news conference at his office at 4 pm where he was expected to announce the dissolution of parliament.

Zahir said he received a letter from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah at 12.45 pm to inform him of the royal consent for the dissolution of parliament.

The dissolution of parliament put to rest months of speculation and anxiety of a snap general election well ahead of the expiry of the term of parliament in June next year.

The speculation grew even more intense last night when Dr Mahathir cancelled a long-scheduled trip to South Africa to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

According to the federal constitution, general election must be held every five years and within 60 days of the dissolution of parliament.

A hive of activity in the corridors of power preceded the announcement of the dissolution of parliament and the state legislative assemblies, except for that in Sabah and Sarawak, which hold their state elections separately.

It began with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi calling on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong at 8.30 am and this was followed by Dr Mahathir himself arriving at the palace half an hour later.

Dr Mahathir, who is also chairman of the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, met Yang di-Pertuan Agong at Istana Negara this morning, apparently to inform of his decision to dissolve parliament and call for fresh election.

A palace official said the deputy prime minister briefed the King on matters related to today's weekly Cabinet meeting, a routine which the prime minister usually does himself.

After meeting the King, Dr Mahathir and his deputy were seen leaving the Istana Negara in the same car for the Cabinet meeting in Putrajaya.

After the Cabinet meeting, the prime minister held an urgent meeting with Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers.

Dr Mahathir also scheduled a meeting with leaders of the BN component parties at 3 pm just prior to the scheduled 4 pm press conference.

The 14-party BN groups Umno, MCA, MIC, Gerakan and PPP in Peninsular Malaysia; Liberal Democratic Party, Akar Bersatu, United Pasokmomogun Kadazan Organisation, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah and Sabah Progressive Party in Sabah and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu, Sarawak United People's Party, Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak and Sarawak National Party in Sarawak.

According to the Election Commission, a total of 9.7 million registered voters will be eligible to cast their ballots in the general election.

The last general election was held on April 24 and 25 in 1995 with just over nine million eligible voters on the electoral rolls.

At stake are 193 Parliamentary seats, one more than in the 1995 election following the addition of the Mambong constituency in Sarawak, and 394 state seats in Peninsular Malaysia.

The Sarawak and Sabah state elections are held separately. The Sabah state election was held in March this year while state election in Sarawak is not due until next year.

In the 1995 general election, the BN won a resounding four-fifths majority of 162 Parliamentary seats and the opposition captured 30 seats.

At the state level, the BN won 338 seats and the opposition 56 seats.

The 1995 polls results showed Umno capturing 89 Parliamentary seats, MCA (30), MIC (seven), Gerakan (seven), PBB (10), PBDS (five), SNAP (three), SUPP (seven), SAPP (two), LDP (one) and one direct BN candidate from Sarawak who did not represent any BN component parties.

In the opposition camp, the 1995 general election saw DAP securing the highest number of parliamentary seats with nine followed by PAS (seven), Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (six), and PBS (eight).

At the state level, the 1995 results saw Umno securing 230 seats, MCA (70), MIC (15) and Gerakan (23).

The opposition's 56 state seats in the 1995 polls came from PAS (33), S46 (12), and DAP (11)

To-date, the number of parliamentary seats being held by the BN has increased from 162 to 166, including through defections by opposition MPs.

BN has also increased its state seats from 338 to 349 to-date, with the bulk coming from former S46 state assemblymen who joined Umno following the dissolution of the party.

-- BERNAMA

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