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Nomination-Night

STRAIGHT FIGHT IN MOST SEATS FOR GENERAL ELECTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 (Bernama) -- The Nov 29 general election is heading to be the most keenly-contested between the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) and the four-party opposition front with straight fights in nearly 80 per cent of the 193 parliamentary constituencies at stake.

According to the full outcome of the nominations which was only made known some 10 hours after they had closed, a total of 429 candidates filed their nominations for the parliamentary seats and 812 candidates for the 394 state constituencies.

The BN is contesting in all parliamentary seats, including a walk-over gained in the Betong constituency in Sarawak which it won uncontested.

Election Commission Secretary Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said the 152 straight contests for parliament seats was the highest since the first election in 1959.

Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in Jitra, Kedah after filing his nomination that the BN was confident it would get a two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat in view of the increasing support from the people.

In a 10-minute radio interview with Radio Malaysia Kedah, he said the people should use the vote wisely in their own interest and that of the country and not to vent their anger.

He also said the BN had introduced new faces for the election so that they would contribute to the country's renewal and the combination of old and new.

The opposition front comprising PAS, DAP, Parti Keadilan Nasional and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) which call themselves Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front) put up 173 candidates.

The four parties thus kept their pledge of not contesting against each other. In previous general elections, a clash among opposition parties in the same constituencies was commonplace despite having electoral pacts.

Of the 173 opposition front candidates, PAS fielded 62, DAP 47, Keadilan 60 and PRM four.

The other candidates comprised 27 independents, 17 from the Parti Bersatu Sabah, 12 from the newly-formed Malaysian Democratic Party (MDP), five from the Sarawak-based Star and one each from Berjasa and Akim, both Kelantan-based.

The nominations were conducted virtually incident-free and with the usual air of festivity as candidates walked in procession to the nomination centres accompanied by a crowd of supporters carrying party banners and flags.

Apart from the straight contests, 37 parliamentary seats will be a three-corner affair, two four-corner and the Kota Belud constituency in Sabah having the most number with five candidates.

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 427 candidates contested the 192 parliamentary and 852 aspirants for the 394 state constituencies. There has been an additional parliamentary seat since then.

Shortly after nominations closed after two hours at 11am, rumours started flying that both the BN and PAS had won some seats uncontested.

As it turned out, BN had won one parliamentary (Betong) and one state

seat, Tangkak, in Johor.

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 with candidates from PAS.

Dr Mahathir is being challenged in the Kubang Pasu stronghold in Kedah by Subky Abdul Latif, a party central committee member and columnist of Harakah, the PAS newspaper.

Abdullah, who is contesting his Kepala Batas seat for the sixth time, faces businessman Abdul Khalid Rasid, a political unknown.

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.

Dr Wan Azizah herself is standing in her husband's constituency of Permatang Pauh in Pulau Pinang where she takes on Anwar's former protege Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad, who is Deputy Transport Minister.

Also in Pulau Pinang, DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang, a Member of Parliament for 30 years, created a surprise by switching from Tanjung to the Bukit Bendera parliamentary seat. He is also a candidate for the Kebun Bunga state seat.

PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor, who has won his Bukit Raya state seat four times, also moved to the Anak Bukit constituency this time. He also goes for the Pendang parliamentary seat after losing his bid for the Kuala Kedah seat in the last election.

In Kelantan, Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat told reporters that PAS leaders and members were in high spirits and confident that the party would retain power in the state for the third time.

PAS captured Kelantan in the two elections but is facing determined onslaught from the BN this time led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who dissolved his breakaway party, Semangat 46, to rejoin Umno en bloc with his members two years ago.

Tengku Razaleigh is again contesting in Gua Musang and he faces another unknown, Abdul Razak Abbas, of PAS.

While the battle for votes is expected to be intense between BN and the opposition front in Peninsular Malaysia, the BN is banking on the 49 parliament seats up for grabs in Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan on Borneo island to help deliver the two-thirds majority it is confident of getting to be returned to power.

Only parliamentary seats are being contested in Sabah and Sarawak which hold their state elections separately.

In Sabah, the BN is facing the formidable PBS which fielded 17

candidates, but it is expected to romp home quite comfortably in Sarawak based on past trends.

-- BERNAMA

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