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519 straight fights (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Barisan Nasional and the Opposition will face off in 192 parliamentary and 393 State constituencies in one of the most hotly-contested general elections since Independence.

When nominations closed today, the two remaining seats - one for Parliament and the other for the Johor State Assembly - were won unopposed by the BN.

The winners were incumbent Douglas Ugah Anak Embas for Betong in Sarawak, and Yap Chik Dong for the Tangkak State seat in Johor.

Most of the constituencies - 152 parliamentary and 367 State - will see straight fights between candidates from the BN and the Alternative Front - a loose coalition of Pas, Parti Keadilan Nasional, DAP and PRM.

Altogether 425 candidates will be vying for parliamentary seats and 811 for State seats come polling day on Nov 29.

The scene at many nomination centres took on a festive air when candidates showed up with supporters bearing flags and banners.

Although there was much competitive shouting and cheering, no untoward incidents were reported.

The Election Commission also lived up to its promise to be liberal about technicalities because although scores of objections were filed, there were only four disqualifications including that of Malaysian Democratic Party secretary-general Wee Choo Keong in the Bukit Bintang parliamentary seat.

Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived to file his nomination papers at the Kubang Pasu district office at about 9.20am to cries of "Hidup Mahathir!"

Dr Mahathir, who has held Kubang Pasu since 1974, was accompanied by BN State candidates Barishah Saad (Tunjang), Prof Othman Ishak (Jitra) and about 5,000 supporters. He faces Pas Federal Territory commissioner Subky Abdul Latif.

In Penang, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also filed his papers for the Kepala Batas seat accompanied by a procession that included his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.

His opponent is Pas' Abd Khalid Rasid.

The Alternative Front's hopes of having former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as their Prime Minister have been dashed because Anwar, convicted of corruption in April, decided not to contest.

However, Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail is standing in her husband's former Permatang Pauh seat against Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad.

The spotlight will be on this contest because Ibrahim, a former associate of Anwar, is determined to keep the BN seat.

In Johor, MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik is defending his Labis seat against deputy Johor DAP chief Ahmad Ton.

Both MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik are involved in three-cornered fights in Sungai Siput and Beruas respectively. The candidates in both instances are from the DAP and MDP.

First Finance Minister and incumbent Tun Daim Zainuddin will face Mokhtar Mansor of Keadilan in Merbok.

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang is standing in the Bukit Bendera parliamentary seat against Gerakan secretary-general Chia Kwang Chye in

what promises to be an exciting "fight of the two sec-gens".

Lim, who has abandoned his Tanjung political agenda, will also face incumbent Penang Island Municipal Council president Dr Teng Hock Nan in the Kebun Bunga State seat.

Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor will face BN's Datuk Othman Abdul for the Pendang parliamentary seat.

He is standing in the Anak Bukit State seat against incumbent Datuk Abdullah Hasnan Kamaruddin.

Pas orator Datuk Harun Din was not fielded although he had made known his intention to take on Dr Mahathir in Kubang Pasu as well as become the next Menteri Besar of Perlis.

In the last election, when 192 parliamentary seats were at stake, the BN held 162.

The remaining were won by DAP (nine), PBS (eight), Pas (seven) and Semangat '46 (six).

The BN also captured all the States except Kelantan which Pas had won when it contested the 1990 election in a pact with the breakaway Umno faction headed by the State's strongman Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

This time around, most of the Semangat '46 members are back in Umno and Tengku Razaleigh is spearheading the BN battle for Kelantan.

All eyes will be on the battle for Kelantan. Tengku Razaleigh is seeking re-election in his stronghold of Gua Musang. Facing him is Abdul Razak Abbas of Pas.

There is no contest for State seats in Sabah and Sarawak where the State elections are not due till later.

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