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Sarawak Assembly dissolved (HL)

Sulok Tawie

KUCHING, Mon. - The Sarawak State Legislative Assembly was dissolved today to enable fresh State elections to be held.

The dates for nomination and polling are expected to be announced by the Election Commission tomorrow.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, announcing the dissolution at a packed Press conference, said the Yang di-Pertua Negeri, Tun Abang Muhammad Salahuddin Abang Barieng, had consented to the dissolution of the 62-member House.

Deputy Chief Ministers Tan Sri Dr George Chan and Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, Environment and Public Health Minister Datuk Amar James Wong, and Social Development and Urbanisation Minister Datuk Dr James Masing were also present at the conference at Wisma Bapa Malaysia in Petra Jaya, here.

Asked how he felt about holding the election now and not earlier, Taib said: "The same like before. It was held in September (1996), which seems to be a good month." The term of the assembly expires on Nov 18.

Asked whether the election was timed in view of the State's robust economy, he said: "I think the people have a fairly good idea of what we can deliver to them and they can expect this."

He urged the people to abide by the law to ensure a peaceful and smooth election.

"We must maintain the traditions of the past elections which were held peacefully and smoothly."

Taib said the election was not a time to quarrel, but to allow the people to make a decision as best as they could in a peaceful atmosphere.

"The people should be allowed to exercise their democratic rights with full confidence."

He did not think that security would be a problem in the election "because we have our capability in providing security".

Initially, he said some people were concerned about the security in Sarawak because of the manner in which the opposition leaders were conducting their ceramah.

"But since the Federal Government has taken some measures, there is even less chance of violence erupting... but the people must not take the question of security for granted."

On the question of "phantom" voters in Sarawak, he said the Election Commission had made sure that non-citizens were not allowed to vote.

"But if anyone who knows of the existence of phantom voters, they should inform the authorities about it," he said, pointing out that Sarawak's problems in this regard were minor.

On the Barisan Nasional's list of candidates, he said it was "more or less" final.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been informed of the list.

Taib said a good proportion of the candidates would be new faces, but he would elaborate on it "in a few days time".

On whether Housing Minister Datuk Celestine Ujang, who is a senior vice-president of Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu, would be re-nominated to defend his Kemena seat since he had expressed his desire to quit politics, he said:

"He spoke to me but I will reveal it when I talk about the candidates from PBB."

On the Barisan Nasional's manifesto, he said it would be ready before nomination day.

On the chances of Barisan Nasional sweeping all 62 seats, he said they would be working towards such a result.

In 1996 the Sarawak Barisan Nasional won 19 seats uncontested on nomination day.

In the coming election, Sarawak has 861,377 registered voters compared with 814,347 in 1996.